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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

"I Bleed as I Speak": The Body in Pain and the Absent Mother in Liza Potvin's White Lies (for my mother)

BY ©

Colleen Babie

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

Department of English

Edmonton, Alberta
Spring 1994

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Colleen Babie

33 Strabane Place S.W.
Calgary, Alberta
T3H 1H6

16 December 1993

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "I Bleed as I Speak": The Body in Pain and the Absent Mother in Liza Potvin's *White Lies (for my mother)* submitted by Colleen Babie in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Dr. Janice Williamson

Dr. Susan Hamilton

Prof. Lillian MacPherson

15 December 1993

Dedicated, with love, to my best friend and brother, Paul, who has always had more confidence in me and believed in me more than I have myself, and whose sagacious "caveats" have never failed to pay off.

Abstract

This study of Liza Potvin's White Lies (for my mother) is a contribution to the growing number of critical autobiographical incest narrative readings.

Not unlike other literary forms, the incest narrative portrays writing as a process of discovery. This form of trauma literature emphasizes the recovery of memory and puts the trauma in the past. Not only does the writer/survivor speak out of a space of secreted guilt and shame, but the narrative challenges a society which, until recently, left the act of incest largely unquestioned and ignored. The aim of writers such as Potvin is to create a community of listening readers who witness voices which deserve to be heard and taken seriously. While looking at the representation of Potvin's body, the pre-verbal language of her body in pain, and the centrality of the mother figure in her narrative, the present thesis meets such an aim.

In White Lies, the representation of sexual abuse is manifested in four bodies: the split body, the decapitated body, the objectified body, and the shameful body. The mind-body split Potvin performs, her silence and objectification, and her feelings of guilt and shame all result from the paternal sexual and psychological abuse she suffers. While Potvin's degraded and defiled body is represented in White Lies, the figure of the mother is marked as absent. This absent mother and pre-verbal

maternal language are explored as Potvin addresses and contextualizes a specific mother-daughter relationship.

Rather than simply theorizing about Potvin's incest account, though, and in an attempt to point out the importance of coming to terms with particular experience, the academic and the personal are integrated with the inclusion of my own autobiographical "Epilogue."

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I am particularly indebted to Tom Muir, who introduced me to White Lies (for my mother), and without whose copy of the text my interest in Potvin's narrative may never have been nourished.

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I am grateful to Susu, an extraordinary companion, who always knew my state of mind, and who was there alongside me through almost all of the exams, papers, and many moments of panic in my academic life. She would have been just as ecstatic about the completion of this thesis as I was. Her presence in my life will be greatly missed.

I want to pay special tribute to my mum and dad for their unending friendship, without which I would be lost, for their love, wisdom, advice, encouragement, support, financial assistance, incredible ability to keep me laughing through it all, and for everything else. Together, they are my stronghold.

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Lastly, I acknowledge and honour Liza Potvin for her courageous and beautiful voice.

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Introduction

I first became intrigued by French feminist theories of the female body, concepts of "writing the body," "l'écriture feminine," and the "mothertongue"[1] when I was working on my undergraduate honours thesis. My Masters thesis issues in part out of my continued interest in French feminist theory--particularly the concepts of "writing the body" and the "mothertongue"--and its application to the incest narrative.[2] My decision to write my first chapter on the representation of the female body in pain, however, grew out of my concern that French feminist theorists such as Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Julia Kristeva focus rather specifically, although in different ways, on the morphology and jouissance[3] of the female body--on its pleasures and desires--more so than on its pain. After reading several women's abuse narratives, I found myself asking: "What about the tortured female body? What about the bodies of female incest survivors?" The abused female body, the body inscribed with memories of pain, is present in women's writing, yet the amount of critical and theoretical material that focuses specifically on such a body is limited. So, while still relying on French feminist theories, I turn my attention to the text and body of incest survivor Liza Potvin. I am particularly interested in the ways in which Potvin inscribes her already inscribed body in her narrative, and I view my thesis as the creation of a space in which woman's abused body is able to "speak."

Potvin's White Lies (for my mother) is both an address to her absent mother and a narrative about the body in pain. Unlike women writers who explore the sexuality and erotics of their bodies, Potvin locates and writes her split, decapitated, objectified, and shameful body. She does not write about and celebrate the awakenings and discoveries of her sexual body, but rather she returns to, and puts forth for the reader, a body that holds the memories and pain that result from maternal abandonment and paternal sexual abuse. By writing the abandoned and abused body, Potvin articulates one of our culture's most unspeakable secrets (Williamson, "'I Peel Myself Out of My Own Skin'" 133). Through the disclosure of her personal, private experiences, Potvin reveals the secret of sexual abuse.

Nicole Brossard asserts that incest survivor Elly Danica "is a woman who, with all her being, has chosen to tell the unbearable, has taken it upon herself to break the silence" (Introduction 4).[4] This statement reinforces my belief that the act of writing the body in pain, the act of writing an incest narrative, represents the survivor's refusal to remain silenced and victimized. Through the telling, the speaking out of secrecy and silence that has been imposed upon them, women like Danica and Potvin challenge a world which would have survivors remain silent as they give themselves the authority to write about the experiences that our patriarchal society either ignores or keeps hidden.[5]

Throughout Potvin's narrative, representation of the body manifests itself in four ways; White Lies contains four bodies: the split body, the decapitated body, the objectified body, and the shameful body. The first chapter of my thesis, therefore, discusses the representation of the body and consists of four sections: "The Split Subject," "Decapitation: Secrecy and Silence," "The Body as Object," and "Sexuality: The Shameful Body." "The Split Subject" is a discussion not only of how Potvin is a split subject in that she works from multiple subject positions, but also of how she performs a mind-body split in order to endure her experiences of sexual abuse.

In the section entitled "Decapitation: Secrecy and Silence," I discuss and reinterpret the concept of "decapitation" that Cixous postulates in her revolutionary piece "Castration or Decapitation?". Cixous uses the term "decapitation" as a metaphor for the silencing that women have experienced and continue to experience in a patriarchal world. In a discussion of Danica's Don't: A Woman's Word, Linda Warley argues convincingly that the choking Danica experiences at the hands of her father parallels the "decapitation" of women described by Cixous:

> The potency of the phallus depends on woman's

> silence, on her alleged complicity. The choking Elly experiences is a form of decapitation. Her head is gone; her voice is gone; her self is gone. (72)

My argument in "Decapitation: Secrecy and Silence" is similar to Warley's, for Potvin experiences a kind of decapitation comparable to Danica's. The sexual abuse inflicted upon Potvin, as well as the destructive words of her perpetrators, block up the passage of her voice, robbing her of agency and making her self unlocatable. Not only is Potvin silenced because she is a woman in a world dominated by men, but she is also sexually, physically, and psychologically abused into silence.

In "The Body as Object," I draw upon Irigaray's "Women on the Market" and "Commodities Among Themselves" in _This Sex Which is Not One_, among other sources, and explore how women's bodies have been objects of exchange circulating among men. In this section, I elaborate how Potvin's body is an object that is used, abused, and exchanged between the men who occupy her world.

White Lies is also an address to Potvin's absent mother. In her account of incest, Potvin relates memories of a present, yet absent, mother who does not--perhaps cannot?--save her daughter from sexual abuse. She recounts memories of a mother who turns her daughter's presence into absence by renouncing the mother-daughter bond and retreating from her daughter's pain. I would like to emphasize that the experience of being abandoned by her mother is also very much a "bodily" experience for Potvin; she feels maternal abandonment within her body just as much as, or perhaps more than, she feels the paternal sexual abuse her body endures.[6] The second chapter of my thesis, "*'Myrrha, Myrrha on the Wall'*: The Absent Mother," is an elaboration of Potvin's relationship with her mother--or more appropriately, her alienation from, subsequent attempt to reunite with, and final renunciation of, her mother. So while the first chapter of my thesis contains Potvin's paternally inscribed body, the second chapter of my thesis contains the body inscribed with maternal etchings, with memories of the bond that once connected mother and daughter, which, despite her renunciation of her mother, will forever resonate for Potvin. In the second chapter, though, I also deal with the sensitive issue of "mother-blaming." Although I find it difficult to nurture the idea that she was oblivious to her daughter's abuse and utterly unable to do anything about the situation, drawing upon evidence in White Lies, I suggest that perhaps Potvin's mother, like Potvin, found herself without voice and agency.

Finally, my thesis ends with an "Epilogue," a collection of some of my own autobiographical "bodily" musings. Jane Gallop's observation about "thinking through the body" not only contributed to my comprehension of the mind-body split Cixous discusses in "Castration or Decapitation?", but also incited me to begin to think and to write "through" my own body. Gallop speaks about catching and holding onto those moments when thinking truly passes through the body.[7] I am concerned with catching and holding onto those moments when not only thinking, but also voice and writing, pass through both the female incest survivor's body and my own body.

Chapter One.

I. Introduction to the Representation of the Body

In writing White Lies, Potvin has created for herself a space in which to represent, explore, and heal the body that has been so cruelly stolen from her. While she "writes her body" and represents it through writing, she simultaneously takes her body into her own healing hands. "Every day," she shares with the reader, "I do something nice for my body: have a bath, paint my toenails, play sports, ask for a massage. Healing hands. Feel it, shape it. This is my body. I take it into my own hands" (198). This thesis, which is largely the creation of a space in which to theorize about the sexually abused female body, makes the statement that Potvin's body, and bodies like hers, should not be overlooked or under-represented in academic work. Despite a great deal of concern not only over my right to write about, but also over theorizing through, Potvin's text, I believe it is crucial to look theoretically at the female body in pain. Chapters one and two of this thesis, therefore, are academic and theoretical. I also believe, however, that the personal is a part of theoretical work and that it is damaging to attempt to separate the two. In my "Epilogue," which is comprised of a collection of my own autobiographical work, then, I also discuss the importance of merging the academic with the personal.

Representation of the sexually abused female body through narrative is significant and important for several reasons. In order for healing to occur, it is crucial that the survivor be able to look at her body, at what has been inscribed upon it. So, for the survivor, the processes of writing and thinking through the body are cathartic and therapeutic. Telling through narrative also allows the survivor to speak out of her body's pain and out of her silence. Furthermore, the incest narrative encourages the reader, the survivor's listening audience, to look at and question the effects of paternal sexual abuse.

In Potvin's narrative, representation of the body in pain consists of the split body, the objectified body, the decapitated body, and the shameful body. In my discussion of Potvin's split body, I draw upon psychological sources, in which the body that numbs itself to the abuse it endures is referred to as the "split body." In order to cope with sexual abuse, the victim disallows the brain from receiving the body's messages of pain and stops feeling. The body becomes an object separate from the mind, rather than a living, feeling being. By performing a mind-body split in order to cope with abuse, Potvin herself objectifies her body. However, Potvin's body is also abstracted by her abusers, who regard Potvin and treat and manipulate her body as nothing more than an object. Metaphorically, the decapitated body refers to the silencing of some women by men. If a woman's head is gone, her tongue and her voice are also gone. I see the shameful body in women's incest narratives as the body which has been sexually sabotaged and devalued to such an extent that the victim of such abuse and degradation is unable to view herself, her sexuality, and her body as anything but shameful and ugly.

II. The Split Subject

Ellen Bass and Laura Davis effectively develop and define the concept of "splitting." They write that one of the ways to deal with the unbearable experience of being sexually abused

> is to flee from the experience, to split. . . . In its milder form, you live exclusively on the mental level, in your thoughts, and aren't fully present. At its most extreme, you literally leave your body. This feat, which some yogis work for decades to achieve, comes naturally to children during severe trauma. . . . Many adult survivors still do this whenever they feel scared. (209-10)[8]

In her narrative, Potvin relates that the body undergoing sexual abuse at the hands of her grandfather and father is not her own body, and she describes the unconscious act of splitting that Bass and Davis examine. Potvin, who has "never understood why people study yoga, spend hours seeking release from the body" (22), lives on the mental level, a safer and less painful place to reside than the body; at the same time, she opts for the most extreme level of splitting and literally leaves her body. As a child and adolescent, and even as an adult, Potvin cannot physically run away from the experience of incest--although she does attempt to leave her immediate family circle on several occasions--so she "spaces out" (Bass and Davis 45) and leaves her body. In support of the psychological theory of splitting and based on her own experience, Danica discloses that in the act of splitting, "[t]he physical body seems to have a life of its own, separate from the intellect" (Williamson, "'an enormous risk, but its got to be done'" 83). In her incest account, she communicates such a body. Like Danica, Potvin stops feeling as she blocks out her physical pain by deadening her body and living only in her thoughts. Such splitting is a provisional strategy for coping with abuse. Although it is successful in that it is a creative way for the psyche to resolve and avoid terror and loss, splitting fails to finally obliterate the pain and memories of incest, which victims must face as adults healing from incest.

Heidi Vanderbilt's findings correlate with the assertions of survivors like Potvin and Danica. In her extensive and ground-breaking report on incest, she relates that "[s]exually abused children teach themselves to [unconsciously] endure assault. Instead of learning to protect themselves, they learn they *can't* protect themselves" (56). The abjection, defilement, and degradation of her body and psyche force Potvin to split, to dislodge her body from herself so that her body becomes "the body," a disconnected, distant body, an object which is manipulated and abused without her conscious participation.

There is a distinction made between a "me and my body" and a "self and a body." Potvin describes her experience of splitting in the following way:

> I let my mind hover near the ceiling and watch my numbed body lying on the bed, limp, helpless and stupid while I float above it, a flying spectator. I have always looked at myself this way. . . . After all, it is normal to feel nothing, watch passively while things happen to your outer body, as if they are happening to someone else. My body is not really mine. It only looks like me. (22)

And while she floats above her pained body, she is "weightless, [her] head trapped in a bubble somewhere" (61). Potvin's head is devoid of her body's weight as she looks down not at her own body, but at a helpless and limp one. As she is abused, she leaves her body; she watches "someone else" from a distance, as though she is watching a movie (Bass and Davis 73).

In her lengthy discussion of "the body in pain," Elaine Scarry elaborates the distinction between "my body" and "a body." She writes that even though pain "occurs within oneself, it is identified at once as 'not oneself,' 'not me'" (52). Although Scarry does not deal with incest specifically, her theory of the body in pain can be applied to the pain of incest. In terms of incest, "my body" connotes the self-referential, the immediate, which the victim avoids in order to cope with sexual abuse. This is consistent with Vanderbilt's findings; in her report, a victim of incest claims: "'I taught myself to leave my body . . . and to forget. I forgot so well that whole years vanished from my life'" (56). Potvin's utterances about splitting are similar.

Interestingly, the dream Potvin has about a young girl who is raped and the girl's double reflects Potvin's own "splitting": "In my dream I am assaulted by two strange men. I am both the girl being raped in the back seat of the car and her double who is watching everything from the front seat" (206). In the dream, pain is minimalized, and because of the distancing which occurs as a result of splitting, pain is also minimalized in reality. Because splitting occurs, there appears to be "no real experience of pain" and the girl in the dream concludes that "something remains inviolable, intact. No one can take what is yours only" (206). However, as the adult Potvin learns, the body does hold and remember the painful memories and secrets of sexual abuse deposited there.

Other survivors' narratives recount a similar process of splitting. For example, the survivor who uses the pseudonym "Me" in each small step: breaking the chains of abuse and addiction and who refers to her body as "She," writes that

> She was the limp, lifeless body, Daddy
> touched and licked and raped.
> She became my unconscious depository of
> slime, torture, memories and silent
> screams.
> She held it all in loyal silence from
> the little girl. (Marilyn Mackinnon 75)

The experience of pain for the victim of incest is real, but something does remain inviolable. For Potvin, something prevails which her perpetrators are unable to steal from her. Danica also experiences the feeling that somewhere inside herself is a place that has been left undamaged and unviolated by her abusers. That place is her soul: "Soul. A tiny light. If he doesn't know about it I can keep it. My secret. My soul. A self. A star. . . . I have my star search. I believe in soul" (9). And by the end of her narrative, she has found her secret place: "Beginning. Always. From the secret place. Soul dwelling: found. Self: found" (93). There is a self within both Danica and Potvin that is theirs only. Even the monsters that are able to destroy their entire beings are unable to destroy this secret self from which healing and rebirth eventually spring. It is both the act of splitting, the capability of detachment, as well as the awareness of something that remains intact, that lends courage and enables Potvin and Danica to fight and survive.

Adrienne Rich theorizes about locating the self and discusses the abstraction of the body. When one writes or says "my body," she argues, he or she locates a particular self. Among so many other things, what Potvin does through the writing process, through the telling, is search for her self. The incest survivor like Potvin who finds it very difficult to locate a particular self abstracts her body when she says, writes, or thinks "a body" or "the body." "When I write 'the body,'" says Rich, "I see nothing in particular. To write 'my body' plunges me into lived experience, particularity: I see scars, disfigurements, discolorations, damages, losses" (215). Potvin's narrative reflects both the act of saying "the body," the act of objectifying the body, as well as the act of saying "my body," the act of attempting to locate the particular body, its hidden pain, and the self.

Rich uses an effective example of a bumblebee trapped inside the house as an analogy for the struggle to locate the self. This analogy is interesting and useful for an examination of Potvin's struggle for self-identity:

> Beginning to write, then getting up. Stopped by the movements of a huge early bumblebee which has somehow gotten inside this house and is reeling, bumping, stunning itself against windowpanes and

> sills. . . . It is looking for what it needs, just as I am, and, like me, it has gotten trapped in a place where it cannot fulfill its own life. . . . And I, too, have been bumping my way against glassy panes, falling half-stunned, gathering myself up and crawling, then again taking off, searching. (211)

Although Rich is a woman writer who has not experienced the kind of degradation and violation that Potvin has, the disconcerting search for self-identity that she so effectively describes correlates with Potvin's search for self. Like Rich, Potvin finds herself up against "glassy panes"; she must continually gather what is left of her degraded and violated self, and, like the bruised and wounded woman she is, crawl toward that part of herself that remains unviolated despite all that she has endured. The woman who embarks on the search for self, for an indication of the multiplicity of selves which comprise the self, like Rich and Potvin, is the woman who enters unknown and sometimes very frightening territory. Through the writing process, Potvin takes the leap from abstraction to particularity; she engages in and begins to come to terms with her particular body and selves as she plunges herself into her incest experiences. As she investigates her body and its experiences through writing, Potvin acknowledges and comes to terms with herself as a fragmented woman, a woman with multiple bodies and selves. Such acknowledgement leads to the healing process, as I illustrate briefly in the following discussion.

Potvin's narrative reveals a woman who has begun the process of healing from incest, the process of reacquainting herself with both the body that was so cruelly stolen from her and with her different selves. Potvin's self underwent fragmentation as a result of abuse and the mind-body split she performed. For Potvin, reading the body's pain through writing facilitates the acknowledgement and acceptance of the many different aspects of her self. This process of acknowledgement and acceptance is simultaneous with, and is a crucial part of the process of finding a self-identity. In support of the healing process that is taking place in Potvin's text, psychologist Naida Hyde explains that for the female victim of incest, "to know brings relief and freeing of energy and the 'fitting into place' of a part of a woman's self that has been split off since the original trauma" (168). Where Hyde says "a part," I would say "those parts," for Potvin is a woman made up of many selves. The fitting into place of those parts of Potvin's self that have been split off not only means reacquaintance of the mind with the body, but it also means the acknowledgement of conflicting inner selves born to cope with sexual abuse.

This multiplicity of identities indicates that, like all of us, Potvin works and speaks from several different subject positions. Catherine Belsey states that the child

> learns to recognize itself in a series of subject-positions ('he' or 'she', 'boy' or 'girl', and so on) which are the positions from which discourse is intelligible to itself and others. 'Identity', subjectivity, is thus a matrix of subject-positions, which may be inconsistent or even in contradiction with one another. (61)

She goes on to say that "[s]ubjectivity, . . . is linguistically and discursively constructed and displaced across the range of discourses in which the concrete individual participates" (61). Potvin is a female subject constructed through a variety of cultural determinants--political, historical, economic, and social--and discourses. She works from, is defined by, and feels a division between, her subject positions as, among others, incest victim and survivor, daughter, mother, sister, wife, and writer. However, unlike many of us, Potvin performs a mind-body split and is therefore a split subject in another sense; she feels a definite division between the woman she appears to be and the fragmented, wounded woman who feels invaded by, and within whom, "others" live. These "others" who often dominate Potvin's life with their presence and their voices are conflicting aspects of her self.

In order to heal, Potvin must first acknowledge, and then begin to locate, her particular selves. Rather than ignore the aspects of her self which hold memories of abuse and cause her pain, she must acknowledge and honour those aspects, those selves, and the positions they work from. Outlined in her narrative is the difficult and demanding experience of attempting to locate and come to terms with several conflicting selves. As Potvin begins to locate herself through the writing process, she struggles with conflicting inner feelings and voices, conflicting selves. Several psychologists and therapists refer to multiple selves as "crippled inner children."[9] Within the adult Potvin there still remains the split, wounded, conflicting child selves, who can be nurtured only by Potvin herself, who remain victims until she is able to find the strength to mother them. Potvin has given names of colors to these crippled inner children. For instance, "Red," who interrupts Potvin when she tries to be good, is angry all the time and despises Potvin for being weak (54); "Green," full of bile, chokes and sputters when people pay her compliments, and is constantly getting sick; she is Potvin's ugly inner self (54). The "Blue Lady," however, is an inner self who is not wounded:

> The Blue Lady is so ethereal. . . . She is just a piece of blue chiffon that floats in front of me like a ballet dancer. . . . She speaks another language, soft cooing French consonants. She is nothing like me. She radiates blue tranquillity,

> waves of tenderness . . . She is a soft blue light joined to me at my solar plexus, looking straight into my eyes. . . . She is always there when I need her. (54)

Potvin discloses that these women,[10] these inner selves, live inside her all the time, and that she wants to let "all these colors open wide and speak"; she wants to "[r]elease them from the black and white cage of the heart" (54). As she progresses through the healing process and honours her inner voices, Potvin finds that she is able to release her inner child selves and reintegrate them with her adult selves.

At one point in her narrative, Potvin relates the division she feels within herself between an apparently autonomous, coherent woman and the fragmented woman made up of many selves:

> My ordinary life is only the lit room, the visible surface, of the real and mysterious life which is the other place where I dwell. . . . I am waiting; . . . I try on every outfit in my closet, . . . searching for . . . the slightest hint of who I might really be, intimations of some other season just beyond the impenetrable wall. . . . My room is littered with the debris of normality, . . . I think there are children on the other side of the wall; I hear conspiratorial whispers and giggles;

> . . . I think I might be going mad. (13)

The wall and the conspiratorial children on the other side of it can be viewed as analogous to psychological walls which separate Potvin's wounded inner children.

Interestingly, Cixous discusses walls in "Coming to Writing" and Other Essays. She writes that "[b]reaking down walls . . . leads to the recognition of composite selves, composite tongues" (xii).[11] Through the telling, Potvin breaks down the walls within her and begins to come to terms with the multiplicity of selves within her and the multiplicity of positions she works from. For Cixous, the recognition of composite selves is positive and should be put to creative use. She asserts that

> there is no invention possible, . . . without there being in the inventing subject an abundance of other, of variety: . . . the springing up of selves one didn't know. (The Newly Born Woman 84)

Cixous calls such an abundance of other in the inventing subject "ultrasubjectivities" (84). Her discussion of composite selves and ultrasubjectivities is relevant to Potvin and her narrative because Potvin is a prime example of an inventing subject who has within her an "abundance of other" and who writes from a multiplicity of subject positions--all those she herself works from, as well as from those of other individuals who people her narrative.

In her analysis of the "I" in Danica's narrative, Warley explains how the incest survivor speaks from the positions of others and the effect of this on the reader. In Danica's _Don't_, she points out,

> the "I" takes up multiple subject positions. The absence of quotation marks to separate and delineate Elly's speech from others' in the text means that we slip in and out of different positions. (74)

This characteristic can be identified in Potvin's account as well as in other incest narratives. Like the "I" in Danica's narrative, the "I" in _White Lies_ also takes up different subject positions. In Potvin's narrative, however, such different subject positions are determined by the use of italics and are readily recognized. In her narrative, Potvin takes on other voices as she writes and speaks from the positions of her multiple inner selves and from the positions of other prominent figures in her life. As well as the voice of a seemingly removed onlooker who scolds, advises, or quotes from religious sources, the "I" takes up the positions of Potvin's abusers, her mother, her sisters, and religious figures who appear to have played a significant, and detrimental, role in her upbringing. For instance, in the voice of her mother, Potvin says "*Did you hear what I said, young lady? It is your mother you are speaking to, now have some respect*" (32). Presumably in the voice of her grotesquely abusive father, Potvin articulates, "*We will play animals now. I am going to be the dog. Now kiss the puppy's nose. Here, lick it. . . . See, he likes it. Don't worry, He won't bite you*" (41); and "*Don't you dare say a word. No one will ever believe anything you say, you are a worthless little bitch*" (149). In the voice of the scolding onlooker, Potvin relates that "*A good feminist never blames her mother, understands that all mothers are victims of male oppression. It is misguided to hate your mother, there is enough mother-bashing out there*" (31).[12] And in the voice of a religious figure, Potvin cants

> *Almighty Father, who seest that we have*
> *no power of ourselves to help ourselves;*
> *keep us from both outwardly in our*
> *bodies and inwardly in our souls; that*
> *we may be defended from all adversities*
> *which may happen to the body, and from*
> *all evil thoughts which may assault and*
> *hurt the soul.* (29)

Unfortunately and regrettably, each "I" in White Lies is the subject of, and, to borrow Lola Lemire Tostevin's effective words, conveys "knowledge that lies beyond the imagination, . . . knowledge of acts which should be inaccessible to language" (48). The process of splitting and the subsequent fragmentation of the self, then, suggests how the incest survivor speaks in many voices. The next section explores the antithetical process of silencing.

III. Decapitation: Secrecy and Silence

Not only does Potvin split in order to deal with sexual abuse, but she is split--metaphorically decapitated--by her abusers and all they represent. Her abusers, as Jane Gallop would say, "cruelly disorganize" (Thinking Through the Body 1, 5) Potvin to such an unbearable extent that it causes her to split. Gallop begins her piece "Thinking Through the Body" by quoting Rich: "'I am really asking whether women cannot begin, at last, to *think through the body*, to connect what has been so cruelly disorganized'" (1). She goes on to say that "for Rich, thinking through the body is not primarily a happy reunion" (1), as is also the case for Potvin. The mind-body split is a form of decapitation and Gallop asserts that "if we think the mind-body split *through the body*, it becomes an image of shocking violence" (1). Gallop also points out that

> [w]hereas decapitation actually severs head from body, strangling simply stops the life-giving flow between the two. Strangling may be a more accurate figure for the "cruel disorganization" that prevents us from thinking through the body. (5)

Although I use "decapitation"--metaphorically, as does Cixous--, I am in agreement with Gallop that perhaps "strangling" is a more accurate term to use to describe the experience of the mind-body split.

The act of splitting that Potvin performs not only prevents her from "thinking through her body," but it also results in her unequivocal silence. Although Potvin is not literally decapitated, the men in her life "cruelly disorganize" her by forcing her to lose her head in a world of silence, a world where it seems normal to feel nothing and where she must leave her body. It is only as an adult that Potvin, through telling and writing about her incest experiences, breaks her silence and begins to look and think through the secrets her body holds.

Cixous argues that all women are decapitated, for she states that

> [w]omen have no choice other than to be decapitated, and in any case the moral is that if they don't actually lose their heads by the sword, they only keep them on condition that they lose them--lose them that is, to complete silence, turned into automatons. . . . If man operates under the threat of castration, . . . it might be said that the backlash, the return, on women of this castration anxiety is its displacement as decapitation, execution, of woman, as loss of her head. ("Castration or Decapitation?" 481)

Cixous takes the position that women have been taught that if they want to speak, they must speak as patriarchy would have them speak; otherwise, they must remain silent. Too many women know, first-hand, the consequences of speaking out of the boundaries imposed upon them in our male-dominated world. (One only has to glance at the newspapers to see the inexcusable and unjustifiable ways in which the legal, political, economic, religious, and academic systems fail women.) Theorists like Cixous and Irigaray argue that masculist language prevails and dominates in our society, and that if they want to be heard when they speak, women[13] must silence their own voices and let only masculist language emanate from their mouths.[14]

If one agrees with theorists such as Cixous, Potvin, like all women in our patriarchal society, is decapitated. But unlike other women who have not experienced and do not experience the kind of abuse she does, Potvin, as a victim of incest, is endlessly decapitated. She is continually decapitated by her perpetrators' words, mouths, tongues, hands, and penises, which become violent weapons; she is literally and physically sworn to secrecy and silence. Masculist language and silence are simultaneously forced upon her. If she talks at all, she speaks the words her father forces her to speak through horrendous sexual, physical, mental, and verbal abuse; otherwise, she must remain absolutely silent. Moreover, Potvin is threatened verbally with what will happen if she does not remain silent about the appalling abuse inflicted upon her.

To support the argument about the silencing of women and make it more particular to the silencing of female victims of incest, Warley writes, in her discussion of Danica's Don't, that "[f]or Elly, the abuse of her body and the silencing of her female voice go hand in hand" (72). The hands of Danica's perpetrator, her father, at her throat "ensure that her silence signals acceptance. If she talks at all, she must utter the words of the father" (72). Potvin's abusers also decapitate her by forcing her to perform a mind-body split, and their hands at her throat also represent Potvin's decapitation. With their hands, her perpetrators block up the passage through which her voice would travel. Potvin communicates the endless feeling of her father's "[h]and clutching at [her] throat each night. Even years later, its phantom grip overpowers [her]" (81). She also describes, in his voice, her father's "ploys," his threats to keep her silent about his abuse: "*Shut up and do what I say. If you cannot close your mouth then I guess I will have to do it for you.*" (81); and "*I am going to give you a big slap if you don't shut up right now. That's for nothing. Imagine if I gave you what you really deserved*" (148).[15]

In chapter two, I discuss the Symbolic language of the Father and the pre-Symbolic, pre-verbal language of the maternal, of the womb, in great detail. However, I would like to point out briefly here that Potvin is decapitated in that she loses her head to silence and becomes estranged from her female body language and her female voice when she enters the Symbolic, when she is introduced to the "fathertongue" in the most degrading and atrocious way.[16] In "*'Myrrha, Myrrha on the Wall'*: The Absent Mother," though, I also argue that the language of the maternal, pre-verbal language, is very much connected with the body, and that White Lies, a narrative about an abused and wounded female body, portrays a woman who must necessarily return to and speak with the pre-verbal language of the mother.[17] I elaborate how the physical pain Potvin endures, as Scarry would argue, resists and destroys language, how it brings about a reversion to a state anterior to language (Scarry 3-4).

On the first page of her text, Potvin writes: "I speak with the voice of Philomela, of silence and of pain. Which is to say I do not speak at all" (1). Like Philomela, the Athenian princess who was raped by her brother-in-law and deprived of her tongue in order to keep her silent about the rape,[18] Potvin is raped and her tongue is severed. Potvin laments: "My work, like my tongue, is cut out for me" (7); and "A severed tongue the price to pay for a superior kind of love, the silence of martyrs. And then to be abandoned, deserted, misled" (36). Potvin loses her tongue and her voice as a result of separation from her mother and entry into the Symbolic. But silence is also enforced upon her by her mother, who abandons and turns a deaf ear to her daughter, and by her perpetrators, who batter and rape her with their words, hands, tongues, and penises and cut out her tongue so that she cannot relate such defilement. Potvin's violators, like Tereus, Philomela's violator, protect themselves from discovery by imprisoning her in silence. By cutting her tongue out, they kill her female voice and block the passage of her pain and rage. Potvin recounts a time when her father broke her jaw in order to keep her silent: "It is the same memory that haunts me, the salty waves of hot words trapped inside my throat, the broken jaw He insists I got from falling out of my wagon" (81). Because she is deprived of her voice, Potvin attempts to reach out for help by speaking with the language of her body. She attempts to reveal the pain which is held within the confines of her body by speaking with a language that has not reached verbal expression, a language of the body. Speaking with the pre-verbal language of visceral cries and moans is the only way Potvin knows how to reach out for help.

Potvin, then, speaks in at least two ways, in the fathertongue and the mothertongue. This corresponds with Gail Scott's theorizing in Spaces Like Stairs:

> We women have two ways of speaking. The first begins in our mother's womb as we listen to the rhythms of her body . . . As girls, we continue to

> develop this largely oral tongue in our ongoing relationship and identification with her . . . but at the same time we are developing another relationship to the 'fathertongue' of . . . all patriarchal institutions. Consequently, we end up with a split relationship to language: there is the undernourished woman's voice, . . . and the other language, . . . (67)

Scott and other feminist writers argue that the maternal way of speaking and the female voice are lost during the development of women's relationship to patriarchal discourses which all women "learn" and by which they are defined, spoken, and silenced. As a young girl, Potvin is less advantaged than other women when it comes to the development of her mothertongue because her mother has broken the mother-daughter bond. Potvin's mother contributes to her invisibility by refusing to acknowledge Potvin's presence, by refusing to speak to her daughter or to hear and acknowledge her daughter's pre-verbal cries for help. As Potvin says to her absent mother: "I follow your thoughts, I speak to you quietly. *Je te juis*. But you never answer me" (3). While this section looks at Potvin's decapitation and silencing, the following section examines the objectification of her body.

IV. The Body as Object

> Women are treated like objects because a society based on violence, exploitation, and oppression assumes that our lot is dispossession (no name, no identity, no rights, no body), rape, terror, and murder. We are, . . . objects to be used, battered, exchanged, manipulated.
>
> Editorial Collective, in Marks and de Courtivron 230

Many feminists argue that men possess women's bodies and view them as nothing more than objects for their use, abuse, and material benefit. For example, Benoîte Groult asserts that women are viewed as nothing more than individuals created for man's pleasure and subject to man's whims (70). And several feminist writers argue that sexual abuse is compatible with the patriarchal vision of women and children as servants, objects, commodities, and possessions, and that it is also a result of the misogyny that is prevalent in our society. In her article "Theoretical perspectives on father-daughter incest," Cathy Waldby cites Elizabeth Ward, who states that

> "the mainstream of masculine sexual behavior . . . sees women as sexual commodities and believes men have a right to use and abuse these commodities how and whenever they can." (Driver and Droisen 100)

Waldby deals specifically with father-daughter incest and does not look at the sexual abuse of males. Because the present thesis looks specifically at Potvin's text and Potvin's body, I do not integrate women as perpetrators of sexual abuse, and I have researched neither the effects of sexual abuse on male victims nor male accounts of incest. I am very much aware of the dangers of using an overarching category and I am not suggesting that all men act according to such brutal patriarchal socialization and objectify, abuse, or exchange women. I am also aware that both men and women are perpetrators of child sexual abuse, and that the sexual abuse of male children is prevalent. In an article entitled "How sexually abused boys grow up to be tormented men," which appeared in the Edmonton Journal, Tom Arnold writes that "[t]he effects of sexual abuse are equally profound and similar for both sexes" (E1), but that "[a]s recently as 1987, very little research on childhood sexual abuse among adult males existed in Canada or the United States" (E1). He goes on to document that "[i]n well over 90 percent of reported cases [of sexual abuse of male children], the offenders are men" (E1), and Catherine Hedlin, of the Edmonton Sexual Assault Centre, states that "'a majority of abused men are sexually abused by other men'" (Arnold, "How sexually abused boys grow up" E1). Such findings are in keeping with the notion that some men regard women and children, both female and male, as possessions and as objects to be used and abused. Unfortunately, many men do believe it is their right to abuse, control, manipulate, degrade, and violate both women and children; therefore, many women and children are treated as objects subordinate to men.

Female victims of incest are constructed and socialized as objects to be defiled, rather than as the thinking, feeling human beings that they are. Toni McNaron and Yarrow Morgan state that

> "if we begin to speak of incest, we may realize its place as a training ground for female children to regard themselves as inferior objects to be used by men." (Alcoff and Gray 262)

And anthropologists Isenberg and Owen argue that "'[t]he individual's body is presented to him [or her], taught to him [or her] by society, usually in the manifestation of parents'" (Young 43). Potvin becomes a body which is sexually, physically, mentally, and verbally battered by her abusers. She learns from both her abusive father and her non-protecting mother that her body is nothing more than a sexual object. Danica effectively communicates a similar enforced acceptance of such teaching:

> In my teens, not earlier, I challenged my mother about what was going on, and she said, well look, I married him, this is the way it is, and it can't be changed. . . . This was a lesson she expected I would learn too--not to challenge but to accept the world as defined by my father and other men.

> (Williamson, "it's an enormous risk, but it's got to be done" 78)

As a young girl, too young to learn such "lessons," Potvin, like Danica, learns that her father holds the abominable and illogical belief that women and children were created for men's disturbed and grotesque pleasure. Danica's father communicates such a learned belief. When Danica asks him, in _Don't_, why he beats her, his response is "Because you deserve it. Because I like it. I can do whatever I like" (42). Also beaten, Potvin is an object dominated by her father's "whims." For instance, taking on her father's voice, Potvin writes "*Stupid fucking girl. . . . This is for nothing, take off your pants, imagine what you will get if you really do something! That's funny*" (11). The following is another example of the beatings Potvin endures:

> When I am bad, I am very bad, and He takes his belt to me, wide and well-worn leather. It hangs on a rusty nail in the basement, and I see it every day on my way to feed the dog. (29)

The belt is a constant reminder to the young Potvin that she is subject to her father's commands. Survivors like Danica and Potvin, who are battered and violated, are alienated from their bodies, robbed of their rights, and stripped of an integrated sense of identity.

Through the act of writing, Potvin articulates her own objectification, comes to see, and attempts to make the reader see, how she has been constructed, used, and abused as an object, how not only incest victims, but many women are socialized into viewing themselves solely as the property and possession of men. Texts like Potvin's call attention to incest; they force the reader to look at what it is society is doing by leaving unacknowledged and unquestioned the sexual abuse of women and children. As Danica says,

> I tried to write about pain in a way which had to be experienced by the reader and very carefully weighed. We have lots of straight-up narrative that says this happened, that happened, . . . These are important, but they don't seem to have been enough to get the culture as a whole to look at what it is we are doing when kids have to survive this kind of pain and trauma, or to consider how we disempower not only those children but the adult women and young men these people become. . . . We who were taught as children that we are victims ask as adults less of our society. . . . There is rhetoric on the surface which says in a very vague way that abuse ought not to be done, but, in fact, patriarchy also gives very clear permission for males to abuse. (Williamson, "'an enormous risk, but it's got to be done'" 80)

Potvin, like Danica, writes about incest in a way that is experienced by the reader. Both Potvin's and Danica's narratives interpellate the reader as one who will not misread (Williamson, "'I Peel Myself Out of My Own Skin'" 140), and as one who will start to question the until recently secreted act of incest.

Not only is Potvin a sexual object, but she is a sexual object of exchange, a commodity, in her perpetrator's world. Irigaray, whose theories help to clarify what goes on in Potvin's narrative, discusses the notion of women as commodities in This Sex Which is Not One. She maintains that women are "traditionally use-value for man, exchange-value among men. Merchandise, then" (188), and that they "always pass from one man to another, from one group of men to another" (171). This economic argument is reinforced by Catherine MacKinnon's statement that "[w]omen's sexuality is, socially, a thing to be stolen, sold, bought, bartered, or exchanged by others. But women [themselves] never own or possess it" (172).[19]

Irigaray also argues that woman's passage into the Symbolic order, the order of language, is assured by the fact that men circulate women among themselves (170), that the transformation of women's bodies into use and exchange value inaugurates the Symbolic order. As the mother-daughter bond between Potvin and her mother is broken, as the first, oral way of speaking is repressed,[20] and as she enters the Symbolic, Potvin's body becomes an exchangeable object--an expression and an inscription of her abusers' values. The fact that Potvin is a human being, not just an abstraction incapable of experiencing pain, goes unnoticed.

As well as a sexual commodity exchanged between her grandfather and her father, Potvin is exchanged between other men for their perverted pleasure. She writes about her father's poker games where her father allows his male friends to sexually abuse her:

> I understand the game, they divide my clothes after the poker game . . . or sometimes play Spin the Bottle. One of them is Mr. Wilson. Another one is very old, as old as my grandfather, and He always turns the bottle toward me, . . . They tell me that if I do not co-operate and play the game, I will be punished, and He rubs at his belt meaningfully. I know what that means, so I take off my undershirt . . . I am nearly naked now, and there is something soft underneath me, a rug. (109)

Potvin also dreams about these poker games:

> For several days I have been haunted by the sound of ice cubes tinkling against glass as I go about my chores. . . . They are drinking and playing cards. . . . The pain is unbearable; I cannot breathe; it is very hot down here on the rug with the big body on top of mine. (165)[21]

Moreover, her father also unscrupulously tells Potvin that she has no value as a commodity on the marriage market: "*You are so ugly no one wants to look at you. How will I ever get someone to marry you, when you are so ugly and clumsy and have no brains?*" (11). The degrading verbal comments her father attacks her with, as well as the objectification and defilement of her body, initiate shame in Potvin. The "shameful body" is the subject of my next commentary.

V. Sexuality: The Shameful Body

As a result of her sexual abuse, Potvin is alienated from and fears her body and her sexuality. Hyde discusses the incest victim who experiences shame and states that "[t]he woman who has been sexually abused . . . carries a double shame and a double pact of silence--once for being a woman in this male culture and twice for having been sexually abused" (Laidlaw and Malmo 166).[22] In "Repairing Personal Boundaries: Group Therapy with Survivors of Sexual Abuse," Maureen McEvoy writes that "[i]ncest is about secrecy. Carrying such a secret inevitably breeds a sense of isolation, of being freakishly different, of being unspeakably dirty and shameful" (Laidlaw and Malmo 63). Potvin, as both woman and victim of incest, carries the double shame Hyde discusses.[23] Because of women's subordination, many women are predisposed to a sense of shame simply for being women. Such a sense of shame is doubled for women like Potvin, who come to view their bodies and their selves as dirty and responsible for the abuse. For example, Potvin thinks of herself as a sinner; as she envisions herself as "a dirty lung, choking on its own filth," she wonders, "[H]ow . . . will [I] ever erase all this blackness inside me, . . . ?"(9), and she asks her mother, "Will you still love me when you find out how rotten I am inside?" (52). She prays to the Lord, asking that he take her body rather than her soul, because, she says, "I don't care about my body, it is ugly and dirty" (44). Rather than recognizing that her body hurts because of her abuse by perpetrators who are her enemy, Potvin believes that "my body hurts" means "my body hurts me" and views her body as the enemy. Potvin is the agent, who, by viewing her body as a site of pain, shame, and disgust from which she must turn away,[24] makes her body into an object. Potvin, believing that she is truly corrupt and rotten, takes on her perpetrators' actions; therefore, she blames herself for causing her abuse. Such an assertion of agency is perverse and self-destructive, for it is the incest which is the source of her feelings of shame.

Moreover, Potvin not only views her body as dirty and shameful, but because she is used and viewed as such by her father, she also views herself as the depository of his evil. She envisions a black hole (80, 81), a black wound inside her that is festering (174), that threatens to engulf her (151). On the matter of women as "depositories" or "holes," Irigaray argues convincingly that, in heterosexual relations, "the vagina is valued for the 'lodging' it offers the male organ" (This Sex Which is Not One 23). This concept is elaborated by another French feminist, Françoise Parturier, who writes a letter addressed to an imaginary male interlocutor:

> "A woman is a piece of ass. . . . A woman is a

> hole, a receptacle. Let them open their legs and shut up, that's all we ask of them. . . . it's often the girl's fault, and after all, they only get what they deserve. Since they act like whores, why be surprised that they are treated like whores?" (61-2)

This letter portrays the prevalent and horrifying attitude in our society of some men toward women, of Potvin's father toward her.

After her father molests her, the four-year old Danica asks her mother, "Will I always be sore there now mommy?" (26). This is a question that all female incest survivors might ask, and the equally painful answer is that as long as she is viewed as an object and a depository, the female incest victim will be sore. As one of the survivors interviewed by Vanderbilt relates, "'I was invisible, . . . That's all I was--a vagina. Nothing else existed'" (54).

Some survivors not only feel, but are explicitly told, that the incest is their fault. Bass and Davis, as well as Judith Butler, further elaborate this notion. Bass and Davis write that "[s]ome survivors were told explicitly that [the incest] was their fault. The abuser said: 'You are a bad, nasty, dirty girl. That's why I'm doing this. You really want this to happen. I know you do'" (104). And Butler asserts that the male interpretation appears to suggest that if incest does happen, the victim was seductive, wanted it, and is to blame (328-29). Potvin's father is one such perpetrator who explicitly tells his daughter that the abuse is her fault. "*You made me do it you little whore*" (38), Potvin remembers him to have uttered. Not only does he accuse Potvin of causing her abuse, but he also has the audacity to claim that his actions are performed out of love and for her health and well-being. He "consoles" Potvin with "*I only have your health and welfare in mind. Daddy knows what is best for you. This hurts me more than it hurts you. I am doing it for your own good, because I love you*" (61). He even goes so far as to tell Potvin that by being compliant, she is helping her sick mother. As Potvin writes to her mother, "He said what I do is helping you, that you always do it for Him, but that I should now that you are sick" (72).[25]

Furthermore, Potvin's father, who uses sex as a violent weapon, kills all that is sexually beautiful within his daughter, causing her to perpetually live against her body, and leaving her with an unhealthy knowledge and fear of her sexuality. Although she is not speaking about the kind of psychological, physical, and sexual abuse Potvin suffers, Xavière Gauthier effectively communicates woman's sense and fear of living in a strange, sick, unknown body:

> And when our bodies do speak to us through sickness, we feel surprised, attacked as if by something outside ourselves. We do not feel, we

> do not control, we do not seek our own health. Our bodies do not belong to us. We live with them, but without them, in spite of them, against them. (200)

When they realize what they have endured and that their bodies are ill because of it, Potvin and other incest victims also feel attacked and out of control of their lives and their bodies.

Cixous asserts that women have been taught not to explore and know their body. According to her, the female body "is still unexplored only because we've been made to believe that it was too dark to be explorable" ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 255).[26] In "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays," she argues that woman "has not been able to live in her 'own' house, her very body," and that "[w]omen haven't had eyes for themselves. They haven't gone exploring in their house" (The Newly Born Woman 68). For Cixous, the majority of women are alienated from their bodies as a result of living in a male-dominated world where everything, including sexual desires and fantasies, is determined for them. For victims of sexual abuse, the sense of alienation from their own bodies is much greater. As a victim of sexual abuse, Potvin's sexuality is cruelly stolen from her.

Long before puberty and the beginning of womanhood, Potvin learns that she is merely a whore, and that her body is an object. Potvin's perpetrators take her body from her and make it impossible for her to see it as anything but shameful and dirty. Indisputably, her abusers spoil the celebration of womanhood for Potvin and make her afraid of her own sexual discovering, afraid of changing into a woman. *Potvin fears the maturation of her body, for it draws the* attention of her father:

> I walk with hunched shoulders, or swagger with upraised shoulders, hiding my breasts, hoping they will disappear from view, that no one will grab them from behind, or poke at them the way He does. *Hey, hey, getting to be a little woman now, eh?*" (118)

Furthermore, Potvin's mother does not explain womanhood and menstruation to her daughter. As Potvin writes to her mother, "You never tell me about my body, except to say I am too plump" (65). Nancy Chodorow would say that the reaction of Potvin's mother to her daughter's weight is an unconscious reaction to her daughter's body as her own (Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory 58). She would argue that Potvin's mother views not just her daughter's body, but also her own, as unacceptable. There is evidence in White Lies that this may be the case: "Maman, you always say you are too fat. You stand in front of the mirror and pinch the folds of skin over your stomach and your face fills with despair" (83). Patricia Paskowicz adds that a woman like

Potvin, then, will view herself negatively for both allowing an incestuous relationship to occur with her father and for eating (112).

As an adolescent, Potvin is "ashamed of [her] ungainly body" (120), and the first time she menstruates, Potvin does not know *what is happening and fears that she may be dying:* "My first period begins. . . . I think I may be bleeding to death. He has really done it this time. I am not certain what is happening to me" (94). Also, when she is still practically a child herself, Potvin is impregnated by her father. About this experience she writes:

> What is happening to my body? Every morning for the last three weeks I throw up, drag myself down to the breakfast table. My skirts no longer fit where my belly has begun to swell. Is this why you are sending me to the old country to live with my grandmother? What have I done now? (125)

Potvin, then, learns from both her abusers and her mother not to explore, but to fear and feel shameful about, her body and her sexuality.

The sexually abused persona in Andrea Dworkin's fiction "October 1973 (Age 27)" communicates the female sexual abuse victim's desire not to be a woman, because being a woman brings with it sexual abuse and shame. The persona says: "I know how everything feels. I think if I was a man my heart would not hurt so much and I wouldn't have this terror I am driven by but cannot name" (80). It is because she is driven by pain and terror that Potvin performs the mind-body split I discuss above. She splits in order to escape from and ignore her body's pain. From the time she is a young girl, Potvin knows that an exploration of her body would only uncover too much pain and too many memories of horrific abuse; she knows that the consequences of exploring her body are simply not worth it. However, Potvin realizes, many years after her experiences of incest, that keeping memories of such experiences hidden is more detrimental to her well-being than uncovering and working through them. Part of the healing process for Potvin occurs through writing, for by relating her experiences of incest through writing, Potvin refuses to remain merely an object figured as "lack, absence, hole, or wound" (Williamson, "'I Peel Myself out of My Own Skin'" 17), and she explores and re-claims her body.

Chapter Two.

"*Myrrha, Myrrha on the Wall*": The Absent Mother Figure

> Maman, Maman, *why hast thou forsaken me*?
>
> Liza Potvin

> I want to shake you by the shoulders, slap you hard in the face, wake you out of your somnambulism, point to that invisible umbilical cord and twist it until it bleeds. Just so that I might sense something, make you feel me.
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In her autobiographical incest narrative, with its references to mirrors, song, the umbilical cord, and her mother's face and body, Potvin "re-traverse[s] the mother as origin, voice, song, and body" (Conley 83). White Lies consists of Potvin's search for her mother, for the time before the Symbolic, which brought with it the horrific language of her grandfather and father, the "language" of sexual abuse. White Lies is structured around her mother's absence and it reflects Potvin's desire to eliminate the distance between her mother and herself so that they might be reunited. Painful as it is, Potvin accepts, "in her adulthood, the task of calling back, remembering, and taking care of her absent, silent, dispossessed, lost mother" (Brandt 61).[27]

The task of calling back, of searching for the absent mother, also entails a search for the self; the search for the mother is entangled with the search for the self. Theorists such as Irigaray and Vivien Nice support this argument, for they argue that the bodies and, therefore, the identities of mother and daughter are, ultimately, inseparable. In her exploratory piece "And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other," Irigaray communicates that the mother-daughter entanglement, which begins at the moment of conception, continues throughout life, despite its repression at the time of the daughter's entry into the Symbolic. Irigaray's piece illustrates the continual eclipsing, each by the other, of the mother's and daughter's identities, and conveys the daughter's desire to have an identity separate from that of her mother's:

> I would like both of us to be present. So that the one doesn't disappear in the other, or the other in the one. . . . I look like you, you look like me. . . . I came out of you, and here, in front of your very eyes, I am another living you. (61)

Likewise, in Potvin's text, as well as the strong emphasis on her mother's absence and her inability to love and mother, there is also an insistence on the lack of separation between mother and daughter, on the bond that exists between them. That this bond between them is damaged, that her mother rejects her and is unable to mother--which further complicates Potvin's sense of identity--, does not eliminate the fact that Potvin lived within, and was born from, her mother's womb, nor does it eliminate the fusion between mother and daughter that took place there. Nice argues convincingly that separation between mother and daughter is an elusive concept, "for really it isn't possible to split off mother and woman, to view one without viewing the effects of the other" (232). Potvin's text demonstrates the paradoxical desire both to return to the semiotic state of union with the mother in order to eliminate the distance between mother and daughter, and, so that she may give birthright to herself, to separate from--to "other"--the toxic mother with whom she is inextricably connected. White Lies, then, not only attempts to repair the irreparable bond between mother and daughter, but also performs a kind of symbolic matricide.

In order to free herself of the pain and the unbearable sense of emptiness caused by her mother's absence, Potvin renounces her mother. As Karen Gould says, the act of writing is a "painful but necessary inscription of death as well as birth" (136). Such an inscription of death, however, is problematic if we agree with theorists such as Irigaray and Nice, for it only results in the continued repression--after entry into the Symbolic--of the interpenetration of mother and daughter that characterizes female identity. Although Irigaray addresses her mother with "Forget you in me, me in you. Let's just forget us.

Life continues . . . " ("And the One Doesn't Stir" 63), it sounds unconvincing; the ellipses, as well as her piece as a whole, suggest that such forgetfulness is, ultimately, an impossibility. Similarly, Potvin wishes to forget her mother's absent presence within her, just as her mother erased her daughter's presence; White Lies seems to be saying "Farewell, Mother, I shall never become your likeness" (Irigaray, "And the One Doesn't Stir" 62). Potvin does, however, retain her mother's likeness: "I look at myself in the mirror sometimes, . . . I think there is something of you imprisoned in my face" (107); "In me you live on" (101). I suspect, therefore, that Potvin still has a great deal of work to do on her identification and boundaries with her mother.

At any rate, Potvin journeys to the semiotic, the pre-Symbolic order, and although she returns motherless from this journey, such an excursion is liberating in that it allows for the creation of a space in which Potvin is able to break with the paternal order. Although reunion with her actual mother is impossible, Potvin's return to the pre-Symbolic order enables her to create a female text that opposes the language of her abusers, as well as the patriarchal structures and discourses of which the language of sexual abuse is an extension. Gould writes that "the womb is . . . the place from which, . . . the feminine text is 'bled into print'" (136). And Patricia Klindienst Joplin writes that "woman's body is the original page on which her story is written in blood" (263). Potvin transfers the story written in blood on her body to the page; her text is bled into print: "I bleed as I speak, red ink pouring across the page" (8). Although White Lies, then, registers the physical loss of the mother, it also registers the discovery and utilization of the "mothertongue," the semiotic voice of the womb, of blood, the body, and song. In my discussion of the absent mother in White Lies, I will elaborate Potvin's excursion to the pre-Symbolic order, the interpenetration that characterizes the mother-daughter relationship, the renunciation of her mother, and her symbolic rebirth and acquisition of the mothertongue.

In "Hysteria, Psychoanalysis, and Feminism: The Case of Anna O," Dianne Hunter argues that entry into the Symbolic interrupts the development of the mothertongue. Hunter writes that "[b]efore we enter the grammatical order of language, we exist in a dyadic, semiotic world of pure sound and body rhythms, oceanically at one with our nurturer" (98-9).[28] The grammatical order of language, the Symbolic, comes into being at the time of the "mirror stage," which represents the moment when the subject is located within, and subject to, the order outside itself.[29] Feminist theorists discuss the effects of the mirror stage on female children, and state that the mirror stage is the time when the female child represses her connection to her mother

(Hirsch, "Mothers and Daughters" 210), when the mother's presence is depressed (Smith 57), and when the self that is seen in the mirror is severed from the self that nurtures (Irigaray, "And the One Doesn't Stir" 64). It is the time when "[d]iscovery of the father's role and male dominance conjoin with the integration of the . . . child into the systematic organization of language" (Hunter 99). Coming to language, the child becomes subject to the Name-of-the-Father (Hirsch, Mother/Daughter Plot 168), to the male-defined Symbolic order.

Potvin learns male dominance, the father's role, and his language all too well. Upon her entry into the Symbolic, she not only enters the potentially damaging patriarchal world, but she also enters the horrific world of sexual abuse. The separation from her mother and the realm of the semiotic at the time of entry into the Symbolic is further exacerbated for Potvin at the point of entry into a particular kind of language: "[T]he language of . . . invasion and betrayal, a language which has hidden at its center the sexual abuse of children" (Brandt 140). Furthermore, Potvin is doubly separated from her mother at the time of birth, when her mother refuses to breast-feed her (189),[30] and at the time of the mirror stage and entry into language. It is not only separation from her mother at the time of the mirror stage, therefore, that signals Potvin's entry into the unprotected world of male aggression, but also the traumatic experience of her mother's rejection and absence.

The centrality of the mother in her narrative suggests that Potvin feels more betrayed by her mother's inability to mother and protect her than by her abusers' invasion of her. Potvin writes:

> All I ever repressed was trauma, . . . I never desired for any of this to happen, but my inner child did not know how to resist, was taught not to hurt peoples' feelings. And the wound I feel at your absence is greater than any wound from him. (195)

Her response is one experts such as Butler have noted is common to incest victims (330). Butler espouses a powerless mother hypothesis and states that it is often easier for incest survivors "to be angry at the one who doesn't have power rather than at the one who is the legal and actual perpetrator" (330).[31]

It is interesting to note that when Potvin realizes that her father may have been a victim of child sexual abuse, she forgives him. But even though she realizes that the same may be true for her mother, she is unable to forgive her mother and her anger towards her erupts. As she writes,

> [i]t takes a long time for me to recognize that what happened to me also happened to them. It

> never occurred to me that boys might suffer this too. All my life it has seemed obvious that women were victims. Flashback: my grandmother showing me a picture of him as a young boy, curly hair, teased for looking like a girl each time she took him out in the perambulator. Later an alter boy in the church. And of course his Father. *By the fruit shall ye know the tree.* Now the focus shifts, faint glimmering of forgiveness, sorrow. I feel released. Conversely, my anger toward you, Maman, explodes. (184)

Although her mother's unwritten story is another chapter in the tyranny White Lies illustrates, Potvin writes part of that story into her narrative with her allusions to her mother's miscarriages, nervous breakdowns, and the humiliation and psychological abuse inflicted upon her by her husband (117).[32] For example, Potvin relates: "This is my dilemma: You simply are not there. A phantom besieged by miscarriages and nervous breakdowns" (75); and "Maman, you see *The Exorcist* and have another nervous breakdown, describe yourself as possessed, relieved that you have finally found a name for it" (116). Potvin also recounts indications of humilation and degradation in her mother's body language:

> [Y]ou twist your face when you cook in the kitchen, a horrible grimace. . . . *I am really*

> *quite stupid, don't know what I would do without Him. He is my rock, my pillar of strength.* Your body bent in humility, or sitting with one leg twisted around the other under the kitchen chair like a vine around an arbor, your hands nervously fluttering around your face or clutching a cigarette. (83)

Such allusions indicate that Potvin's mother is hiding not only her love for her children beneath her fancy clothes, her material possessions, and her devotion to God--White Lies reveals a materialistic, religious mother--, but also her own pain. She may be hiding the pain of her own experience of sexual abuse, suffered at the hands of her father. Potvin recounts a meeting of the women in her family, at which cousins and aunts reveal their experiences of sexual abuse, and she informs:

> Twenty-two abused by my grandfather. Four generations of abused children. . . . My Aunt Claire, the eldest daughter of my grandfather, now in her sixties, has just begun to remember. (214)

Concerning the mother's history of sexual abuse, Janis Tyler Johnson writes that

> [n]o clear link has yet been established between a mother's own history of sexual abuse and her awareness of the incest, her ability to protect her daughter from incest, or her capacity to be

> empathetic to her daughter following disclosure. A common assumption is that the mother who herself had been a victim of incest should be more alert to the possibility of incest and want to protect her daughter from a repetition of her own traumatic experience. My own hunch, based on my clinical work . . . is that a mother's denial and suppression of her own experience may play into the denial of what may be happening to her daughter. She may believe, . . . that because she survived her incest experience (and usually without any help), that her daughter should be able to do the same thing. (107-08)[33]

Since Potvin presents herself as having been "sinned" against by her mother, it is important to interrogate some of her assumptions and to examine conditions such as her mother's illness, her mother's possible history of sexual abuse, and the power relations between her mother and father.[34]

Moreover, there is evidence in the text that perhaps Potvin's mother is not as unseeing, unloving, and uncaring as Potvin makes her out to be. For example, when Potvin experiences her first nervous breakdown, it is her mother who understands what she is going through and who is there to comfort her. Potvin writes:

> I call you over after not having slept for two

> nights; . . . I am going over the edge, something inside me has cracked, . . . You always come in a hurry when I am failing. You enter the tiny living room and immediately sense the significance of my chaos, see the dead moth lying on the middle of the floor and realize why I am crying. (133)

As well, Potvin does have memories of happy times with her mother. For instance, she recounts a time when she and her mother laugh together:

> [W]e play the game where I am a clown, and you cover my face with spots of white Nivea cream, my spotted mask absurdly cheerful and funny. You wipe off the mask, chanting slowly, Rub it in, rub it in. I think this may be my only memory of us laughing together. (29)

She writes about another imaginary game in which her mother delightedly participates:

> I have one beautiful picture of you in my memory. We are sitting in a field of spring flowers, . . . I watch your magic fingers weaving a crown of daisies. When it is finished, you place it ceremoniously on my head. . . . You tell me I am a flower princess. . . . you are smiling. (56)

These happy memories suggest that others like them involving Potvin and her mother do exist.

The memories recounted in her narrative reflect

Potvin's desire to return to the semiotic, of which the mother is the locus (Hirsch, Mother/Daughter Plot 171), to the time before her perpetrator's language and laws and their confiscation and abuse of her body. She longs to repair the damaged bond between mother and daughter, "[t]he bond passing through flesh, blood, and milk, through the life debt" (Cixous, Newly Born Woman 103). Potvin communicates her longing to be nourished and loved by her mother with endless references to threads and mirrors. Such references are indicative of both the semiotic state of union with the mother and the mirror stage. For example, about her excursion with her mother and sisters in a House of Mirrors, Potvin writes:

> We are going through the House of Mirrors, there are so many versions of my mother and me, endless replications, . . . Then it is just me alone, I have lost my mother and there is only my distorted and bloated face ahead of me, threads of candy floss glued to my fingers. (62)

About her longing for her mother she writes:

> This longing for you stretches across my heart like Ariadne's thread, our visceral connection, the longing to be entwined in the twin spiralling arms of love, . . . I want you to speak to me before I lose the end of my thread. (156)

In Greek mythology, Theseus, a heroic youth, uses the thread of Ariadne to find his way out of a labyrinth after slaying a Minotaur (Hamilton, 151-2).[35] Potvin must work her way through the complex labyrinth and hold on tightly to the thread that connects and leads her to her mother. Unlike Ariadne, who with her thread helps Theseus find his way out of the labyrinth, Potvin's mother takes her end of the thread and travels farther and farther away with it. It is painful and taxing, therefore, for Potvin to maintain her grasp on and attempt to salvage what little remains of her relationship with her mother. Her mother's absence and indifference amplifies the distance between them, making the bond between Potvin and her mother invisible and reunion impossible. Potvin communicates her frustration at her mother's refusal to acknowledge the mother-daughter bond:

> I want to shake you by the shoulders, slap you hard in the face, wake you out of your somnambulism, point to that invisible cord and twist it until it bleeds. Just so that I might sense something, make you feel me. (107)

In The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism, Marianne Hirsch writes that Irigaray identifies the cutting of the umbilical cord with the child's original trauma--this nombril, the scar, is the first and foremost trace of identity and the perpetual reminder of an initial traumatic rupture (134). More traumatic than the initial severance of the umbilical cord for Potvin is the way her mother annihilates the bond between them with her absence and disinterest. Because the mother-daughter bond is invisible to her mother, who withholds her body and her love, Potvin longs for confirmation within, and from, her mother's body. Addressing her mother, she writes: "I ache for your flesh more intensely than the flesh of an absent lover" (195). Potvin longs for her mother's touch, for it is only her mother's body and her hands that can heal the wound of separation. "Your hands, again" (69), Potvin writes, "come to haunt me. If passion exists in this world, surely it rests in those hands and what they can teach me, . . . How much I want them to hold me. *Only hold my hand, and I shall be healed*" (69). While her abusers' hands are hurtful and violent, her mother's hands, which have the capacity to heal, never touch or embrace Potvin. Her mother's hands, with their inability to heal, then, are perceived of as just as hurtful as, or more hurtful than, those of her grandfather and father. As she laments about her father's crimes and her mother's absence,

> I no longer care about him, nothing can shock me any more. Beneath the horror only this terrible empty sadness, this longing for your hands. The sense of betrayal, the regret at never having known you, the opportunities missed. . . . I am waiting for you still, an unknown stranger. And if by chance your hands should reach for me at the

> centre of the earth . . . (193)

Not only does Potvin search for affirmation in her mother's body and her hands, but she also searches her mother's face for an indication of love, acceptance, and identity. This corresponds with psychoanalytic accounts of a child's relation to the mother. Claire Kahane states that, "[p]sychoanalytically speaking, the precursor of the mirror is the mother's face, in which the child first sees itself reflected" (344). And Hunter asserts that

> [t]hrough her body language--holding, nursing, caressing, bathing, dressing--and then through mirroring, through the image the child forms of itself as it sees itself reflected in the mother's face, especially in her eyes, the mother communicates an identity to the child. (99)

Potvin's mother does not communicate an identity to Potvin through her body language or through her eyes; although she does perform most of the functions expected of mothers, she does so with indifference and without love, continually turning her face away from her daughter. Potvin communicates her mother's inability both to nurse and to caress: "I dream I have become you, Maman, explaining to me as a child why you could never nurse me, that you were sucked dry" (189); and "after all these years of waiting for your touch, Maman. Always I am waiting for you, Maman" (17). Although her mother bathes her, Potvin confronts her with "You try to erase me with a thick Turkish towel" (29). And it is difficult, if not impossible, for Potvin to find a healthy, whole image of herself in her mother's face and eyes because her mother refuses to look at her daughter. As Potvin writes,

> You first kiss me on both cheeks, a cold and icy formality because you never let me see what your eyes are saying as you turn your face to either side, as if in disgust or embarrassment. You tell me you love me. . . . Then you turn away. (37)

Like the mother in Irigaray's "And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other," who, always distracted, turns away (61), Potvin elaborates how her mother is distracted by the worlds of clothing, jewelry, fine food, and religion she immerses herself in. All of these pursuits mean more to her than her children:

> How will I describe the indignities you force me to endure, the way you look away when I need you, the ugly clothing you deliberately choose for me, the cheap food you feed your three daughters while you and he dine on wine and pâté later on? (32)

While they are at church, Potvin distracts her mother, who deliberately rebuffs her fascinated child:

> I love to hold your hand in church, twisting the diamonds around your finger, watching the play of light on those brilliant stones, . . . I run my

> rough fingertips, . . . along the edges of your perfectly-filed nails, wrap my stubby fingers around your elegance. Suddenly you notice me, stop staring distractedly at the alter, slap my hand. (74)

And although her mother tells Potvin that she loves her, love does not emanate from her face or her voice, to which Potvin responds "*A mother always loves her child.* Somewhere you must be hiding your love for me, your heart wrapped under furs" (110). "Did you ever love me? Wasn't I lovable enough?" (20).

Potvin searches her mother's face for a sense of her own identity. This exploration is consistent in feminist theorizing about identity from a variety of perspectives.[36] Throughout her narrative, Potvin refers to her mother's body as space, as geography. Melanie Klein theorizes about the mother's body as a "beautiful land" to be explored (Suleiman, "Writing and Motherhood" 357). Cixous, too, postulates the notion of the female body as land, and discusses the mother's face as geography, stating that "the Face [is] the maternal geography that is the signature of life for the infant" ("Coming to Writing" 187). In her journey back to the semiotic, Potvin explores her mother's body for love, acceptance, and identity, but all she finds there is icy coldness and disinterest (63). Her mother's body and face have never been, nor will they ever be, anything but unresponsive and indifferent. So, the maternal geography Potvin explores is not beautiful, and the only country she finds there is a "northern country where nothing unfreezes" (28).

Potvin associates her mother's absence and indifference with images of ice and snow. An interesting study would be to look in detail at the images of ice and snow and the numerous references to Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale The Snow Queen in White Lies. In Andersen's tale, a wicked troll creates a mirror in which the reflection of everything good and beautiful dwindles and in which worthless, ugly things are made much uglier (1-2). In this mirror, "[t]he most heavenly landscapes looked like cooked spinach, and the nicest people were turned into hideous monsters who stood on their heads and had no stomachs" (2). When the trolls decide to "fly up to heaven with it and make fun of the blessed angels and of Our Lord Himself" (3),

> [t]he mirror quivered so with frightful laughter that it slipped from their grasp and crashed down to earth, where it broke into hundreds of millions of billions of pieces. And now it caused even greater misery than it had before, for some of the splinters were so fine . . . that they whirled about all over the world, blowing into people's eyes . . . In a few cases a splinter found its way into a person's heart, and this was a dreadful

> thing, for pretty soon their hearts were turned to solid ice. (3, 6)

Splinters of the mirror become lodged in the eye and heart of Kai, the little boy in The Snow Queen. Because his vision is distorted, he is easily deceived by the cold-hearted Snow Queen, who captures him and takes him to her castle. As the Finn woman in the story relates,

> "It's true that Kai is with the Snow Queen. He's quite content there. In fact, he thinks himself most fortunate. But that's all due to the troll's mirror. He has a splinter of it in his heart, and a speak of it in his eye, too. These must come out or he will never be human again, and the Snow Queen will keep him in her power." (94)

The Snow Queen's castle is a place where "[t]here was never any gaiety" (Andersen 101); it is "[v]ast, empty, and ice-cold" (Andersen 102). Potvin feels such emptiness and dreariness when she is in her mother's presence and imagines that her mother is the Snow Queen, who does come from "the old country, the Snow Land" (37, 124). Like the kisses the bitter Snow Queen bestows on Kai, Potvin's mother's "kisses are colder than ice," and they go straight to her heart (28). Potvin, like Kai, whose heart is practically a solid lump of ice (Andersen 103) and who sits in the Snow Queen's vast, empty hall "so stiff and still, you'd have thought he'd been frozen to death" (Andersen 106), inhabits a frozen state. Potvin recounts memories of such a state:

> School is cancelled. . . . the snow is piled in our stairwell and we cannot even open the door to go out and play. . . . I read the same book over and over. You stay in the other room. We avoid looking at each other, do not know what to say to each other. . . . why did you never want to rescue me from my frozen state? The snow punishment lasts seven days, . . . (68)

Furthermore, the mirror of Potvin's mother is like the troll's mirror in The Snow Queen:

> In your looking glass, the loveliest forest scenery appears like boiled spinach, while all that is good and beautiful shrinks into nothing. When you hold your mirror up, I can see that it is made of thousands of splinters, . . . If a little glass splinter becomes lodged in the heart, it is transformed into a lump of ice. (28)

I equate this looking glass with the face of Potvin's mother. When Potvin looks into the mirror that is her mother's face for an indication of self, she is left with nothing but a fragmented sense of identity. The above passage suggests that her mother's face is equivalent with the mirror in The Snow Queen, which perverts everything and everyone reflected in it, but it also suggests that her mother's face is splintered into thousands of fragments because of her harsh and callous demeanour.[37] When Potvin looks into her mother's face, fragments of glass become embedded within her; from her mother, Potvin inherits bitterness, aloofness, and a distorted sense of identity.[38] Her mother's face, then, which "at will could give . . . sight, life, or take them away" (Cixous, "Coming to Writing" 3), robs Potvin of an integrated sense of self and self-worth, leaving the adult Potvin a cold, fragmented woman made of glass shards, a female Humpty Dumpty who cannot be put back together again. As Potvin writes, "My veins [are] full of glass shards. I sabotage every relationship I have. . . . Men like this coldness, they tell me" (106); and

> Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall.
> Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
> All the Queen's horses and all the Queen's men
> Couldn't put her together again. (14)

The Queen who cannot put Humpty/Potvin together again is Potvin's mother, the Snow Queen. "[U]ntil some kind soul brews me a drink that will lend me the strength of twelve men," Potvin writes, "I shall never crack the code, never overthrow the Snow Queen who holds me in her power, . . ." (28). It is only when she finds her own strength and renounces her mother that Potvin feels released from both the power of her mother's stoniness and disinterest and from her own state of fragmentation and frozenness. Then she is able to assert: "The Snow Queen has been dethroned. In spite of your neglect, the ugly duckling has turned into a white swan. . . . I let you go, Maman" (211).

Although, from the time of Potvin's birth, her mother's cold and indifferent face is a primary and significant contributor to her fragmented sense of self, Potvin's horrifying and painful experience of molestation and rape at the hands of her perpetrators amplifies and enforces it. Drawing on my earlier discussion, I find that not only is Potvin left with a fragmented sense of self as a result of both her mother's absence and apathy and her experience of sexual abuse, but, as I previously argue, also because of the mind-body split she performs in order to cope with her abuse. As a child, she cannot physically run away from incest, so Potvin leaves her body in an attempt to block out the physical pain inflicted upon it. It is only when she escapes from her abusive situation and renounces her mother that Potvin can begin to work toward the healing of her fragmented self.

As a child Potvin desperately longs to identify with, emulate, and look like, her mother. She believes that one way to eliminate her mother's absence and indifference and obtain her approval is by becoming her: "I try to fill your shoes, to make the breadcrumb coating for the meat in the medium-sized Tupperware bowl as you would, stack the bowls neatly" (76); "for a long time I believe I am you. He says I look just like You" (72); and "It makes me happy when He says I look like you. I think you are beautiful" (74). As a child, then, in a futile attempt to gain her mother's affection and approval, Potvin longs to be just like her mother, and mimics her in every way she knows possible. When her mother is sick, the eight-year old Potvin does fill her mother's shoes as she takes on the responsibilities expected of a wife and mother:

> If I could only be perfect. Remember to sweep all the crumbs from under the table, mix the powdered milk to be ready for breakfast, make my sisters' lunches. Plan the next meal, leftovers, see what needs to be put on the grocery list. Wipe the counter. Turn out the stove light. (77)

She must be meticulous so as not to be punished by her father, who rages at her that she is a hopeless case (77). Furthermore, when Potvin's father sexually abuses her, she believes that she is helping the mother she so desires to become. She writes: "He said what I do is helping you, that you always do it for Him, but that I should now that you are sick" (72). And the parish priest tells her that she should "[T]ry to understand that Father is under a great deal of pressure, that . . . mother is very sick, and that He is having a hard time managing without her right now" (99).

The incest that White Lies recounts might be read by some theorists in terms of the dysfunctional family model of father-daughter incest when the father turns to his daughter(s) when his wife is absent or ill, or when she has terminated sexual relations with him. As Nice asserts, "[w]hen the mother is not available to service her husband's needs then the expectation is that the daughter will take over that role" (88).[39] Such a reading, however, would only amount to mother-blaming and a failure to see incest as "further along on the continuum of societally condoned male behaviors," as "culturally and politically sanctioned violence against women and children" (Butler 325).[40] I agree with Susan Kraus who says that it is wise to challenge family-systems interpretations and who asserts that it is important to look beyond the mother when we need someone or something to blame (24).

While she longs to be just like her mother as a child, as an adult Potvin fears her resemblance to her mother, and feels threatened when she sees her mother's iciness and self-loathing in herself. She writes:

> I look at myself in the mirror sometimes, and for a moment, before I turn away, I think there is something of you imprisoned in my face; it catches me by surprise. . . . In the mirror I sense I have inherited your self-loathing, want to cast it away, let it shatter. Sometimes I think I see you standing in front of me. I recognize the mask-like face, the clenched teeth, the cruel, battered lines around the corners of your mouth, the

> clenched teeth and the quivering chin. (107)

Potvin searches for the mother she did not have as a child and longs for some indication that her mother is aware of the bond that exists between them; however, she no longer wants to be the likeness of the mother she has always known as only distant and apathetic. Even though she recognizes such qualities in herself, she does not want to retain her mother's callousness and harshness. Potvin's desire to rid herself of such characteristics could be discussed in the same terms Hirsch uses in her discussion of Irigaray's "And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other":

> Here the daughter . . . pleads for liberation from the icy mirror of similarity where she finds her own image blended into her mother's and in which she finds herself frozen, petrified. She is . . . emptied by the mother's icy non-presence. (Mother/Daughter Plot 137)

Like Irigaray, Potvin acknowledges an inner space, usually reserved for her mother's love and acknowledgement, which is emptied by her mother's non-presence. This sense of emptiness in Potvin persists.

Also, as a mother herself, Potvin fears making the same mistakes with her daughter that her mother made with her. About her daughter's pre-verbal cries, she writes: "I should have listened to my daughter's warning, her instincts were correct. I did not hear her Maman, as you never heard me.

Am I doomed to repeat the same mistakes?" (162). Potvin feels threatened, therefore, when she looks in the mirror and sees her mother in herself, when she realizes that the mirror speaks back to her, telling her that she has become more and more like Maman, programmed against her will (157). In support of this, Hirsch asserts that "[a]dult personality, embedded in connectedness, offers a picture of continued mother-daughter entanglement" (Mother/Daughter Plot 132). After a painful attempt to work through and make sense of the labyrinth of such an entanglement, Potvin finally feels the need to untangle herself from it. As she says, "If only I could unwind all the strands that bound us together" (193). Potvin realizes that her mother cannot find it in her heart to change her response to her daughter (105). So she decides, after addressing her mother with "How strongly I want to be different from you, not to be trapped, hindered. I will never be like you; I will be free" (140), that the only thing she can finally do is give birthright to herself.

In order to give birthright to herself, in order to gain a sense of identity not entangled with that of her mother, however, Potvin must renounce her mother and the strands that bind them. Both female subjectivity and writing depend upon the renunciation of the mother. To support this argument, Hirsch states that the emergence of daughterly subjectivity "rests and depends on the process of *othering* the mother" (Mother/Daughter Plot 136), and Françoise Lionnet asserts that "[w]riting is symbolic matricide" (201).[41] The following passage from White Lies communicates this "symbolic matricide":

> My friend observes that I have been wearing black every day she has seen me for the past two months. . . . You look like a Mediterranean widow, you must be in mourning she jokes. I think about this later. I realize I am mourning the loss of you in my life, Maman. I am finally putting that long-held hope to rest. For years I clung to the illusion that you would one day come to me, say you loved me but had been trapped. I could have forgiven you then. (186)

As this passage and the following one indicate, her mother's symbolic death does not go unmourned. Also lamenting the loss of her mother, Potvin writes:

> For three months I do nothing but cry. The illusions fall away: the cherished notion that you once loved me, that I had a real family, that you will come back to me one day. Nothing but a vacuum. Sadness underneath, unbearable rejection and resignation. (180)

The symbolic matricide Potvin performs, then, is extremely painful for her, yet it is necessary in order for her healing. Potvin also invalidates her mother by placing the dedication "for my mother" in the title of her narrative in parentheses. This is in keeping with Cixous's assertion that the woman in parentheses is repressed or invalidated (Newly Born Woman 75).

Moreover, not only does Potvin renounce and invalidate her mother, but she also renounces the name her mother gave her. In the rite of rebirth, she takes a new name. As she asserts, "I take a new name now, Liza. Elizabeth was your name for me, Maman, . . . I leave it behind, in all its submissive timidity and soft sibilance" (137). It is only after her enforced excursions in too many "regions in flames and regions iced over"--her father's hell and her mother's northern country--that Potvin can give herself "the right birth" (Cixous, "Coming to Writing" 28). It is only after she escapes from her abusive situation, renounces her mother, and rebirths herself that Potvin, released into an identity of her own, can look in the mirror and see herself whole:

> I look at myself naked in the mirror and see my flesh whole for the first time, a stranger to my eyes. Not severed limbs and parts, but a complete image. A miracle: the mirror did not disintegrate into a thousand slivers. My vision has thawed and I see lucidly what it means to be alive. (197)

And yet, regardless of Potvin's resignation of her mother, she still needs to retain a mental picture of her, for she says "And now years later, I carry your portrait in my heart, engraved in the metal of my mind, the only features I ever wanted to keep, indelibly preserved" (140). Potvin's need to retain her mother's features draws my attention to issues regarding the symbolic death of the mother and the rebirth and subjectivity of the daughter that cannot be overlooked. For example, Hirsch, who says that "[t]he image that pervades feminist writing is the image of self-creation--women giving birth to themselves, determining their own course," rightly argues that we need to ask: "[W]hat happens to actual mothers, and what happens to actual children, when women figuratively become their own 'mothers?'" (Mother/Daughter Plot 166). Despite her symbolic death, Potvin's mother lives on in Potvin and the mother-daughter relationship cannot be ignored. As Nice says, "[t]he relationship lives on in the daughter's mind and there is still a lot of work to be done on it" (221). The word "all-seeing" only needs to be replaced with the word "un-seeing" and the following words could be uttered by Potvin: "Now she's gone I carry her inside as she once carried me. Trying to understand the effect of her all-seeing eyes, . . . The love for her. The hate" (Scott 19). Although she performs symbolic matricide, Potvin's continues to carry her mother within herself, trying to understand the effect of her un-seeing, un-loving eyes, trying to understand her mother's feelings toward her as well as her own feelings toward her mother. It is necessary for her sense of self that Potvin work through the effects of both her mother's presence and absence in her life.[42]

White Lies also reflects, in keeping with Potvin's return to her maternal origin, the reversion from the Symbolic to the pre-Symbolic order. As Hunter states, when we accede to the world of communication in words, "we are relinquishing the immediacy of semiotic and corporeal rapport with our nurturer" (99). In the world of the Symbolic, maternal discourse repeatedly loses its direction and meaning in the shadow of the patriarch (Gould 293). Cixous argues convincingly that in the mother's voice, which resonates before entry into the Symbolic, the origin of song is found:

> [T]here never stops reverberating something that, having once passed through us, having imperceptibly and deeply touched us, still has the power to affect us--song, the first music of the voice of love, . . . The Voice sings from a time before law, before the Symbolic took one's breath away and reappropriated it into language under its authority of separation. . . . Within each woman the first, nameless love is singing. (Newly Born Woman 93)[43]

In her search for her mother, Potvin returns to the mother's voice of song, to the mothertongue, as the many references to music, song, cries of distress, and the pre-verbal language of the body in her narrative demonstrate. Such a regression to semiotic communication is a plea to her mother for love and protection, as well as the utilization of a language not authorized by her father. Song is not a component, however, of her mother's voice. Her voice is either silent or, when she does speak to Potvin, like her face and her eyes, it is one of cold indifference. As Potvin says to her, "You speak the language of the Snow Queen, syllables drip slowly from the icicles of your Nordic tongue" (28). From her mother Potvin did not inherit the voice of sweet song, and rather than milk, she swallowed only ice and pain, just as the daughter/Irigaray does in "And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other," who writes:

> With your milk, Mother, I swallowed ice. And here I am now, my insides frozen. . . . My blood no longer circulates to my feet or my hands, or as far as my head. It is immobilized, thickened by the cold. Obstructed by icy chunks which resist its flow. (60)

About her narrative, Potvin writes:

> Maman, this is my song to you. . . . It is not a pretty one. . . . My work, like my tongue, is cut out for me, so the lyrics are ragged. I bleed as I speak, . . . But even if my voice falters, if my line is incoherent, remember that sorrow, like

> music, is inventive. (7)

White Lies, written with the blood of her suffering and the song of her sorrow, is inventive in that it works against the patriarch. Potvin longs to sing with her mother, but, "Even though," she writes, "I hear sweet harmonies in my mind, mere grunts emerge when I open my mouth" (149). Potvin and her mother do not, and never will, "[*soar*] *upwards together, singing happily*" (51). "So," Potvin asks, "how will I sing my song, and who will accompany me?" (31). It is those women who do have the ability to mother who accompany Potvin as she sings her sorrowful song of sexual abuse and the absent mother "to the one who could not" mother her (dedication page). Despite the fact that Potvin's song is one of sorrow and pain, it is liberating in that it works against the patriarchal discourse of her victimizers.

Potvin attempts to communicate her pain with the pre-Symbolic language of visceral cries. As a child and adolescent, she is silenced both by her abusers, who inflict horrible pain upon her body, and by her mother, who refuses to acknowledge her daughter's pain by closing her ears to Potvin's pre-verbal distress cries. Scarry elaborates that physical pain has no voice, that it resists and destroys language, bringing about a reversion to a state anterior to language (3-4). As well, she says that "as the content of one's world disintegrates, so the content of one's language disintegrates," and "self and voice are lost" (35).[44] Because of the abuse, fear, guilt, shame, and silence imposed upon her by her abusers, as well as her mother's rejection, Potvin's world disintegrates and her language is destroyed. Her voice having been stolen from her, she is left with only the pre-verbal language of cries with which to communicate her body's pain.

Potvin relates her mother's failure to hear her daughter's cries and decipher her daughter's bodily messages: "[T]he room where you lie resting is directly adjoined to my bedroom. Can you really hear nothing through the paper thin walls that separate us?" (11); and

> You are picking up the clothes to do the laundry. My cotton underpants lie crumpled and soaked under the bed, . . . Already ahead of yourself, thinking of items to add to your grocery list, you see nothing. You change my sheets every Saturday, Maman. Don't you smell anything funny, notice the stains, the wet spots? *A late bedwetter.* (71)

Hirsch argues that the "greatest tragedy that can occur between a mother and daughter is when they cease being able to speak and listen to one another" (Mother/Daughter Plot 199), and Scarry comments that "to bypass the voice is to bypass the bodily event, to bypass . . . the person in pain" (7). When Potvin attempts to relate her pain, her mother is unable to attribute meaning to her pre-verbal discourse:

> In the beginning no words appear; there are no words with which to convey the truth, only feelings, disconnected and vague. Whole words, let alone sentences, refuse to come. Only an incoherent chant, grunts of preverbal pain. How I wish you were here Maman, because only you can provide the conjunctive verbs, link the monosyllabic utterances with meaning. (18)

Potvin, then, attempts to communicate with her mother, but her mother does not speak or listen to her, does not see or hear the messages her daughter sends off; thus, she erases Potvin's presence. By failing to respond to her daughter's cries and bodily messages, Potvin's mother bypasses her pain and robs her of her visibility. Potvin, on the other hand, listens to and hears both the unspoken language and the body language of her mother's rejection all too well.

Finally, Potvin's reversion to the pre-Symbolic order of language not only indicates her need to communicate her body's pain, but it also illustrates her desire to develop a pre-verbal mothertongue in order to rid herself of, and speak against, the language of her abusers.[45] She writes: "I make an appointment to see a speech therapist, ask for exercises to help me unlock my jaw. I see her for one year and work on relaxing my throat, getting him out of my mouth" (149). As a result of mental and verbal abuse and the invasion and defilement of her body, Potvin falls into complete secrecy and silence. In her narrative, Potvin communicates how her father's words, his hands at her throat, and his penis in her mouth block up the passage of her voice, ensuring her silence. For example, she writes: "Hand clutching at my throat each night. Even years later, its phantom grip overpowers me" (81). In the voice of her father, she says: "*We will play animals now. I am going to be the dog. . . . Now kiss the puppy's nose. Here, lick it. . . . See, He likes it. Don't worry, He won't bite you*" (41); and "*If you cannot close your mouth then I guess I will have to do it for you. Open up wide. Thatta girl*" (81).[46] Through her telling--through the act of writing her story of incest--and her re-traversing of the mother as origin, voice, song, and body, however, Potvin regains her voice, and breaks her silence as she speaks a language not authorized by her abusers.[47]

Although it does not reunite her with her actual mother, and regardless of my suspicion that there is probably still much work to be done on her relationship with her mother, Potvin's return to the pre-Symbolic order enables her to develop the mothertongue, which poses a threat to the signifying systems of the Symbolic. As a self-determined writer, and with her woman's voice of blood, sorrowful song, and the body in pain, Potvin invents a space in which she is able to speak out about her victimization, and in which her abusers, therefore, must remain silent.

The creation of such a space enables Potvin to reclaim her body and rediscover her voice, her vitality, and her dignity.

Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray assert that survivor speech is transgressive in challenging conventional speaking arrangements in which women and children are not authoritative, in which they are denied the space to speak or be heard, or where their ability to speak against men has been restricted (267). And Warley argues that the main project of the incest narrative is "to reveal structures in order to expose them for what they are, and for the damage they do" (71). By writing her body in pain through a semiotic language, not only does Potvin expose and clarify the destructive patriarchal structures of authority that enforce powerlessness, passivity, and silence upon women and children and make their submission almost inevitable, but she also speaks out against and, in so doing, challenges those structures.

As well, by speaking out on her own terms with her woman's voice, by refusing to remain silent and submissive, Potvin participates in a symbolic castration of her abusers. Shirley Hartwell calls attention to the notion of women's words as a form of castration in her review of Danica's incest narrative. She writes that

> [o]ur own words, . . . are a joyous form of castration. That is why men call us castrating

> bitches, use all kinds of unconscionable ploys to convince us that it is safer to keep our mouths shut. Because our words have power. (51)

Woman's voice which speaks out about her oppression, victimization, abuse, and degradation is a voice which speaks against, and disrupts, masculist words and male-dominated modes of being. Woman is not supposed to speak on her own terms, and when she does, it is unsettling for patriarchy because it is empowering for her. Although White Lies is a painful account of the horrendous degradation of Potvin's body and being, as well as an elegiac song dedicated to her absent mother, it is also a narrative of survival and recovery. Through her telling, Potvin liberates and transforms herself from silent victim to engaged survivor (Williamson, "'I Peel Myself Out of My Own Skin'" 133), and no longer adheres to her abusers' paradigm of what it is she should or should not be saying. With self-determination and the help of a speech therapist, Potvin not only regains the voice that was so cruelly stolen from her, but also develops through White Lies a way of speaking and writing--informed by the mothertongue--against the patriarchal discourses which have spoken on her behalf for too long.

Epilogue.

"Autobiographical Skin"

Potvin writes that

> The blankness of the page is my message that invites your gaze, your speculation. I have woven my secrets into the white spaces of nothingness, from rags once torn and then bonded together, waiting for you to unravel them. (1)

This is an address to both Potvin's mother and to me, the reader. Not only do I unravel Potvin's secrets, but I also attempt to unravel some of my own stories as I begin to write from my own embodied context.

The act of writing from an embodied context is a refusal of the intellectual/emotional split, the public/private hierarchy. Such a politics of engagement is imperative for women writing from the positions they occupy both within and outside patriarchal academic institutions. Potvin states, and rightly so, that the world of academia encourages one to remain disembodied, to live in one's head (210). Danica reaffirms this in an interview, when she says that traditional academic training teaches you that the personal is hardly relevant (Williamson, "'an enormous risk, but it's got to be done'" 85-6). Nancy Miller asserts that we have been conditioned to feel embarrassed at our attempts to speak personally in an academic context (5). I find such conditioning and erasure of the personal in academic discourse disconcerting; therefore, in bringing both survivor discourse and my own personal writing into the realm of the academic for my M.A. thesis, I merge autobiographical personal writing with academic writing.[48]

For quite some time, I have been intrigued by the idea of engaging in a dialogue with my body, by the idea of reconnecting my thinking and speaking with my particular body. I have learned, however, that leaving behind my own "[auto]biographical skin" (Brossard, The Aerial Letter 95), weaving self-narrative into critical argument, is an extremely difficult process. My original intention was to scatter autobiographical interruptions throughout my thesis, but because my personal writing voice is just emerging and developing, I find it unsatisfying to write effectively in the personal mode. The present thesis, therefore, contains less personal engagement than I had hoped it would. Nevertheless, this personal commentary is useful and beneficial in that it allows me to begin to get to know my body, which "appropriates, wears, inhabits its own subjectivity" (Young 44), and my self, which I am more alienated from than I thought was possible.

Reading Potvin's text and writing this thesis provokes me to find out who I am, as well as who I am not (which is perhaps the most important step for me at this stage in my personal writing). Journal entries from a personal journal

I began keeping alongside my thesis notes record a journey of self-discovery, of getting in touch with my own pain, as I turn my gaze onto myself as well as onto Potvin and her narrative. In the midst of academic work, I begin to free my female voice, a voice which is, as I point out below, located in the particulars of my history.

I worry about the appropriateness of my response,[49] about whether the personal is simply a drift into solipsism, and I question the act of putting Potvin's narrative in a theoretical framework. However, I would argue that writers such as Potvin invite their readers to engage both critically and personally with the text. It is important to be aware, though, of the implications of theorizing about survivor discourse. For example, simply theorizing might keep me at a distance from, or might be a way of talking around, what is really going on in Potvin's text. Personal engagement, however, seems to keep me connected to the pain of something I have not experienced outside of my readerly engagement with White Lies. It keeps me connected to something that often gets hidden within the beautifully poetic and lyrical lines of the narrative. While I am working and writing through my own experiences, I try to be continually aware--although I admit that my theorizing at times seems to be a strategy for coping with the dreadful truth of incest--of how my experiences differ from Potvin's.

Even though I am not an incest survivor, my autobiographical pieces are of significance. How am I to understand the experiences of others if I do not understand my own? It is only through comprehension that my own experiences can be transformative. And perhaps the writing and relating of my own experiences may only be transformative when, as bell hooks suggests, placed in an academic, theoretical context. hooks argues that

> the realm of the personal can become politically efficacious and transformative and need not obscure conditions of the production of experience, if women do not merely "name" their experiences but also "place that experience within a theoretical context" . . . (Alcoff and Gray 283)

"If the narration of experience is not bifurcated from theory," hooks suggests, "the act of speaking out can become a way for women to come to power . . . "(Alcoff and Gray 283). It seems to me that the act of merging the personal with the academic is the first step in this transformation. Writing about herself, Jouve relates: "[T]his writer wants to find out, through writing, why she writes. . . . She writes as academic, straining towards theory, and as woman" (viii). Like Jouve, I also write as an academic, "straining towards theory," and as a woman working to analyze my own responses. Although our goals and our experiences are significantly different, like Potvin, I want to learn through writing about the woman I am.

Texts like White Lies inform other women that speaking out about specific women's experiences is acceptable. Such texts encourage other women to look at their own selves, break their silence, and tell their stories. Jouve asserts that "the writing of autobiography has been, for many women, the road towards selfhood" (11). Survivor discourse, then, is empowering for the reader as well as the writer, who needs to construct a listening audience. Such an audience enables the writer to move past cause and effect and put trauma in the past. Through writing, the survivor asks the reader for acceptance and belief, but the written text also gives the reader a space in which she can respond to her own experiences. The incest narrative is extremely painful for both the writer and the reader, but it is also affirming. The writer/survivor breaks her silence and gains acceptance; the reader, on the other hand, learns how to read and, in my case, write with personal engagement. In support of this, Williamson writes:

> Those incest survivors who communicate their experience to others through writing re-create [a] community of understanding and release many readers from silent collaboration in their own secreted guilt and shame. ("'I Peel Myself Out of My Own Skin'" 135-6)

Survivors who write about their experiences release other survivors from silence, as well as women like myself, who have not been abused. I have been silent about certain personal experiences, but I am coming to the realization that it is better for my well-being and my sense of self to voice and write about those experiences.

. . . to begin by location (the interdisciplinary/the personal . . .

In order to adequately analyze and locate an incest narrative, an interdisciplinary approach is required. Not only do I draw upon literary criticism, particularly French feminist theories of "writing the body," "l'écriture feminine," and the "mothertongue," but I also explore psychological sources and personal experiences. In order to come to a better understanding of father-daughter incest, I read several incest accounts and did a significant amount of reading in the area of psychology. Such research was helpful in that it enabled me to consider the concept of the split subject, of the self as multiple, from an angle other than the theoretical one developing from Lacan. Psychological literature on incest discusses the survivor who performs a mind-body split in order to cope with abuse. Such literature also enabled me to come to a better understanding of the ways in which the body represses and holds memories of abuse and pain.[50]

Writing about Potvin's personal, very specific narrative while writing my own narrative allows me to view myself in relation to Potvin and other women like her. It allows me to come to an understanding of how very different I am from such women. My specific body and voice is marked by my particular upbringing, education, work, relationships, and so forth. I am aware of the dissonances between survivors and myself and am in no way equating my experiences with theirs. I must look at certain experiences specific to myself in order to better understand who I am as a woman and as a sexual being. For example, some of my autobiographical pieces deal with my sexuality, with my inhibitions and unrealized and unexplored pleasures and desires. I find dealing with my own sexuality difficult enough in itself, so I cannot even begin to imagine what understanding and dealing with sexuality entails for women like Potvin. At the same time as I attempt to understand and make sense of Potvin's world, then, I simultaneously begin to examine my own body and voice and make sense of my own world.

A point of contact: Colleen Frances Babie. White. Female. Heterosexual. Healthy. Irish/Ukrainian. Roman/Greek Catholic. Upper middle-class upbringing. Born in Edmonton, Alberta to an Irish, Roman Catholic, middle-class mother, and a Greek Catholic, lower-class father, the son of a Ukrainian immigrant. Raised in Calgary, Alberta. Educated in music, dance, figure skating, equestrian riding, and literature. Post-secondary education. Feminist. Privileged.

I am "privileged"[51] in that I had an upbringing filled with love, trust, and respect. I never felt betrayed by my parents--the breach of trust between my parents and myself was never broken. My parents' love for me is unconditional. I am privileged in that I was given many opportunities as a child and as a young woman. Although I realize that not being abused isn't a "privilege," that we all have the right not to be abused, because I have never been abused, I am privileged in a way that Potvin and other victims of childhood sexual abuse are not. I have not been verbally and psychologically abused, I have never felt the grasp of hands at my throat, and I have never been degraded and defiled. Instead, my childhood and adolescence was filled with love and laughter, family camping trips, hikes in the mountains, swims in the lake, skiing trips, and endless other family activities.

My youth was decorated with a piano, ballet and figure skating costumes, my own figure skates, my own saddle, a braided leather bridle and leather field boots, a pinstripe riding jacket, and my own horses. Although there are artists and a poet on my father's side, I think my interest in, and love of, the "arts" comes more from my mother. It was always my father's money, though, that enabled me to do the things I wanted to do. And his money is behind my post-secondary education. But I have more than just a friendship with my father's money. Although I saw my father as an authority figure and often feared him as a child, I also possessed a wonderful friendship with him. And although I still disagree strongly with some of my father's traditional, "old country" attitudes and beliefs, my father is less authoritarian and less fearsome than he was when seen through my young eyes, and he and I continue to grow in affirming friendship. My father taught me never to take anything for granted and my unending dedication and determination comes from him. He set the example that hard work pays off, and from him I learned that I would get out of my endeavours only what I put into them. I will forever carry within me the knowledge that my father's father came to Canada from Ukraine with nothing and became his own boss, and that my father worked his way through law school. I will never forget that my father and grampa became successful entrepreneurs as a result of hard work, commitment, and perseverance. I also learned the value of honesty and friendship from my father, a father with whom I laugh and converse, a father who is not exploitative. My father is proud of me, and his action and example as a father and a devoted son makes me feel whole.

The effects of my background are marked by cultural differences. I am beginning to locate and feel the effects of such differences. Like my father, his parents are--his father was[52]--very unassuming, and visiting them was always an "old country" experience. Entering the apartment of my father's parents is like entering the past. When I was a child, I can remember my grannie inviting everyone and anyone into her home. Anyone in need of a meal was welcome at her table. No one could ever eat enough. On every holiday, my grandparents' small apartment would be packed with people eating perogies, cabbage rolls, borscht, marchecians, wheat,[53] pickled beats, and home-baked bread. Many of us ate off of t.v. trays. Although he thought we were spoiled and used to give us shit for getting too many Christmas presents, my grampa was so proud of my brother and I. I have fond memories of my grannie; she and I were always laughing.

Visiting my mother's parents as a child, on the other hand, was a completely different experience. My mother's father,[54] who owned a furniture store, was always dressed in a suit and tie--even on hot Sunday summer afternoons. Her mother, my grandmother, dressed in beautiful, expensive clothes; her fingers, neck, and wrists were always adorned with beautiful jewels. She was so reserved, so delicate, and so lovely. I loved the way she smelled. There was a time when I wore the same perfume she did, so that I could smell just like her. Tea was always served in the dining room out of an immaculately polished sterling silver tea set. The grandchildren were never allowed to touch anything. My grandfather always had a dust cloth nearby, if not in his hand; if he wasn't dusting, he was tending the exquisite flower gardens in his enormous back yard. I never really conversed with my mother's parents. I never spent any of the holidays with them.

It is important to begin to think through the specifics of my upbringing, my parents' upbringing, and my relationships with my extended family, because these play a part in and help me begin to locate the multiplicity of selves that constitute the woman I am. Thinking through the differences and particularities of my immediate family and my extended family helps me to begin to understand my cultural position, as well as the ways in which I relate and react in different situations. It helps me as I begin to think in terms of my body and as I look at my body's particular characteristics and markings. For example, my stoicism and my inability to always express my emotions to others comes from my father, who, I'm sure, inherited these traits from his father. And I can remember the very uncomfortable and strange feeling I used to get when I engaged in intercourse with my first sexual partner that my deceased grandfather Uniacke was watching me. This compulsively "clean" grandfather was a strict Roman Catholic who used to punish my mother and her sisters if they broke curfew. Understandably, my mother and her siblings often feared him. Those who engage in premarital sexual relations, according to the Catholic religion, are tainted, "unclean." Do I see myself as a sinner in my grandfather Uniacke's eyes? As well, my mother's silencing, her desire not let anyone hear or know her business can be traced to her own mother, who, my mother tells me, used to run around closing all the windows in the house whenever a voice was raised or her children were fighting. My mother seems to forget that she, too, does this. She also asks me not to discuss family matters with my friends. I think this kind of silence can be damaging and unhealthy. It took my grandmother Uniacke over eighty years to realize this. Only now, as she suffers from dementia, has my tiny, weightless grandmother become fiery and free-speaking, letting all the secrets out of the closet. She now regrets the great pain her years of silence have caused her. I don't want to feel that kind of pain and regret. I go against my mother's request and discuss my family with my confidantes.

Although White Lies and my autobiographical texts relate differential experiences, there are correspondences between them in that both Potvin's body and my body are marked as feminine; Potvin and I both identify the feminization of the body. Our texts identify female bodies that are objectified and displaced and locate the problem of narration of such alienated bodies. However, while we write about "the body," as if our bodies were not our own, our texts also reveal the process of coming to the sense of particularity, of plunging into lived experience, that Rich discusses. At the same time as I delve into my experiences and say "my body," my body resists and says "abstraction." In piece "XIII," for instance, the body I see when I look into the mirror is a body about which I am critical. This piece and others disclose acts of self-objectification.

The following "autotexts," personal musings, begin to give me a particular sense of my body as a social construct, a social text, marked as a feminine body. Most of my autotexts deal with body image, menstruation, and female sexuality, all of which mark my body as feminine. Some of them also relate aspects of my relationship with my mother. Many of the texts were written during a recent and critical turning point in my life when I was experiencing feelings of distress, confusion, loneliness, depression, and anger. Each piece is an attempt to simply honour, not analyze and "fix" what I was feeling.

Autotexts

I.

Going through a bodily change, a "turning point" in my life. Preparing to write my thesis. Feeling lonely and lost. Making the leap from reader to writer, and feeling the pressure. Feeling inadequate as a writer, as a graduate student. Afraid I might not finish the degree. I want to run home to mum. Mum, who has always put her family before herself, who has always been the one I run to when I need someone. I long to not only be with her, but to be engulfed by her. I am a helpless little girl again and I need her to take care of me. I call her on the phone. Attack her in my mind for not hearing me, for not knowing--even though I don't let on--that something is wrong. Attack myself for expecting her to know. Beginning of September and I am in terrible shape. Feeling sorry for myself. Hating myself for being devastated that my mother can not hear in my voice that something is definitely wrong with me. Yet I am devastated.

II.

Talked to mum on the phone again. She seems completely oblivious to what is going on. (What is going on?) She rushes me, doesn't let me talk. (What would I say?) What I don't voice: "Something's not right with me mum, don't know what isn't right, but something's really wrong. I'm not me. Don't recognize myself." She seems so irritable. Snaps so easily. Is she going through a crisis of her own?

III.

Go home to Calgary for the weekend. Argue with my mother. Accuse her of not knowing her own daughter. We both bawl. I will see my Doctor. Maybe she can tell me what the hell is happening to my body. Decide that maybe I should see a therapist. I'll also see a dermatologist, find out what's causing this flare-up of uncontrollable acne. My mother is supportive, as she's always been. I've been so unfair to her, expected so much of her. I realize that I should not expect her to read me, to take care of me. I am a grown woman. It hits home that I am not a child, that I never will be again.

IV.

I realize, finally, that at the same time as I am going through a turning point in my life, my mother _is_ going through her own crisis: Menopause. It is my turn to be supportive, to give her back some of the understanding, love, support, and caring she has never ceased giving me. I don't know what to say. Don't know how to let her know that I realize she experiencing upheaval too. I buy her a copy of Germaine Greer's _The Change_. Hope it will suffice. Hope she will read it. When is she going to honour her own needs? I'm not so sure she even knows what her own needs are.

V.

I run my hand, my finger tips, under the edge of my jaw. I feel so many bumps, large and small. Adult acne. I haven't had acne since I was sixteen years old. My body is going through a major hormonal crisis. I've been perpetually bloated for what seems like months now. (Maybe it's only been weeks.) My body seems like it's waiting, waiting, waiting for menstruation, but menstruation never comes. My cheeks and chin feel fat. I'm sweating all the time. I've put on weight. I feel as though I have to watch what I eat very closely. I've gone off the Pill after being on it for four and a half years. I haven't had a period for three months. My sex drive is almost non-existent and my mood swings are incredible, irrational, unexplainable. One minute I'm angry and I snap, the next I'm sad and I cry, or else I'm frustrated and depressed, or lonely and miserable.

VI.

Feeling rather bloated today. My face feels puffy. I wonder if this bloatedness will last until I have my next period (who can tell me when that will be?). I feel like I'm walking around in a temporary body. I feel as though my real body will crack through this unfamiliar, inflated one at any minute and everything will be normal again. I must be going through some kind of turning point in my life. I don't like it.

VII.

Unlike Liza, who was forced to turn away from her adolescent body, I was very curious about my body when I entered puberty. Not necessarily my body itself, but what it did, and how it changed intrigued me. I used to watch the blood drip from my body into the toilet and think how wonderfully coagulant it was. It wasn't like the blood that drips from a cut finger or a split lip. It was rich and dark red. "Ox Blood" red and it fascinated me. I did get very ill, though, when I was menstruating, nauseous and doubled over in pain from cramps, and I remember thinking how I wanted the pain to stop. Then it did stop. And so did the rich red blood. I barely spotted when I was in High School. I saw doctors and had ultrasounds, but still don't know to this day why my wonderfully thick blood ceased to flow. Went on the Pill (trusty old Ortho 777) at eighteen. My periods became as regular as the tick-tock-ticking of a metronome. Went off the Pill in May and haven't had a period since. I am starting to long for the sight of that opulent red blood I once knew. I am starting to worry that I may be infertile. I see another doctor (Dr. Best). I am convinced that I have a hormonal problem. She runs every blood test possible. She informs: "I suspect we will find a medical reason for the absence of your periods." No medical reason is found. I'm "as healthy as a horse." No hormonal problems. No high cholesterol. No sexually transmitted diseases. Normal pap. Not pregnant. So what now? Dr. Best tells me to wait a full year. Not to worry. She also tells me that absence of monthly menstruation can increase the risk of ovarian cancer. (Not to worry?)

VIII.

In the months between October and February, I've struggled with my new body. I've resisted it, starved it, hated it. I've longed for the thin 104 pound frame that was mine only one year ago. But then I gave up the struggle. I'm learning how to accept and live with my new body. I'm getting used to it. My mood swings are under control, my acne is cleared up (only because I've religiously pumped Accutane, inflammatory and conglobate acne pills into my body), I'm exercising, eating better, and trying not to worry. I feel good, I'm sure I look fine, but I'm still concerned. Why won't my blood flow?

IX.

Picked up a copy of Kim Chernin's The Obsession: Reflections on the Tyranny of Slenderness. I can't seem to stop thinking about my weight. I've cut back on what I eat since I've started gaining pounds. I'm hungry often, but refuse to eat more than what I've delegated for myself each day. I'm pissed off that I can't eat whatever I want, whenever I want, like I used to. I'm so concerned with my body size. I like being small and don't want that to change. Okay, yes, I am obsessed with being thin. In her "Prologue," Chernin writes that "[t]hrough her concern with her body [woman] is expressing a serious concern about the state of her soul" (3). I think my soul is in pretty bad shape. I think the state of it might have something to do with my mood swings and my depression. (Am I depressed and angry because of my body?)

X.

Perhaps some of my depression stems from my obsession with my weight. Chernin writes that "[t]he very simple idea that an obsession with weight reflects a dislike and uneasiness for the body can have a profound effect on a woman's life" (Obsession 26). I feel as though I cannot possibly feel good about myself if my weight rises past 110 pounds. This is crazy, I know, but the messages my head sends me are amazingly powerful. My head tells me: "You want to be thin. Stay thin. Look skinny. Don't eat. You don't want a butt on you do you? Flat is where it's at." My stomach begs for food. For a time, I deny it it's wishes. Eventually, I give in. I don't binge. I start to treat my body better. Eat healthier foods. Exercise regularly. Things get steadily better. I learn how to deal positively with my body. Maybe something good will come of this "turning point" I'm going through.

XI.

I've only just begun the exploration of my body. When it comes to the pleasures hidden there, I think I may still have a lot to discover. Religion played a significant role in my upbringing, and it continues to pervade my life in different ways. When sexual relations first became a part of my life, I had the strange and disconcerting sense that my dead relatives (rather than the Maker Himself) were able to watch me in the God-forbidden "act." This caused me anxiety of course and inhibited my "performance." To this day, the act of Confession still unnerves me. I resent feeling guilty about the fact that I am no longer "pure," that my "temple" has been "entered." I resent the ways in which the female body has been defined by the Catholic religion. Yet at the same time as I feel like throwing up my hands and walking away from the damaging effects of my religion, it's not that easy. Like it or not, the Catholic ideology is part of who I am. And although I have my qualms with Catholicism, I choose not to eliminate it from my life.

XII.

Not often, but sometimes, I find it difficult to leave my mind and think and feel solely through my body during sex. I get trapped in my mind. The words of radical feminist writers invade my head, and I start to wonder: "Is the vagina nothing more than a repository for the penis? Does making love really only amount to penetration, to conquest? Does the heterosexual woman merely fulfill her male partner's desires?" As I reside in my mind, contemplating and struggling with such questions, I miss out on the pleasure my body is experiencing.

XIII.

What concerns me is that I am a woman who wouldn't know exactly what to say, who would come up blank, if asked what my sexual fantasies and desires look like. I think of my body. Focus first on its shape and size. I think of my heterosexuality, my heterosexual relations. I think of conversations with other women about sex and the female body. The discrepancies in our stories make me wonder just how in--or out--of touch I am with my body and its cravings. At times, I feel desire-less. Then I start to wonder how many women admire their own bodies, truly admire them? I'm starting to explore my body. I want to be comfortable with it, want to love it and revere it just the way it is. (What a task.) At times, the mirror has been my enemy. "Mirror, I ask you, am I attractive? Or are my breasts too small, my thighs too thick, my stomach too flabby? My hips too fleshy? And does it really matter?" We'd be much better off without mirrors, those constant reminders that something is always never quite right. Speaking back to us, the mirror says: "Your bum could be a little less . . . Your hair is a little too . . . Your nose could be a little more . . ." and so on. (The mirror talks too much.) Does my sex frighten me? Maybe it does. I don't easily see my own body. I don't easily touch it. When it comes to my sexual body, sometimes I feel as though I'm lost in a country that is not my own. I have yet to see so much of my own body. I have yet to become familiar with its pleasures.

XIV.

What a reversal. When I went on the Pill, I lost weight and my sex drive increased. Now, I rarely feel sexual. Does it have something to do with the loss of my monthly shedding? I used to feel salacious after menstruation. Now, no blood, no carnal appetite. Where are you blood? Where have you gone libido?

XV.

Suddenly, my body feels "sinful" for the first time in months. I haven't felt sexual since I went off the Pill. At this very moment, I feel exceptionally prurient.

XVI.

I am a stranger to myself. I say my name out loud and it sounds so foreign. I need to get in touch with my self and my body. "How?" I ask. In terms of my sexuality, I have to claim my right to experiment. I must speak about my sexuality, state that I want sex, and set the terms. I am driven by my desire to be the respectable woman I feel I am supposed to be and by my desire to experiment with my heterosexuality. I must work through my conflicting feelings and beliefs.

XVII.

I saw blood today. For the first time in almost a year, I finally saw blood. My body is menstruating. I am elated.

XVIII.

Dr. Best puts me back on the Pill. It's not healthy not to bleed. A year of hell, of adjusting to a new body, could have been avoided. If only I could have known somehow what I would go through, I never would have stopped taking the Pill. (Who was I to think it would be better for my body not to swallow synthetic hormones every morning?) On 4 July 1993, I resume ingesting norethindrone and ethinyl estradiol tablets daily, and every twenty-fourth Tuesday, I slough my uterus. Isn't it better to trick my body into bleeding than not to bleed at all? Being on the Pill supposedly has its benefits. The Pill may reduce the risk of developing benign breast disease, and it may reduce the risk of developing ovarian cysts.

XIX.

I started a Yoga class tonight. Want to get in touch with my body. Need to make connections between my intellect and my soul. It's amazing how aware I became, in one evening, of the pain in my body. Patti, the instructor, advised us to honour what we were feeling in our bodies. I thought about how easy it would be to just stop doing the poses, ignore the pain, leave it buried. But I want to get in touch with that pain, honour it, communicate with it.

Notes

1. The terms "writing the body" and "l'écriture feminine" are defined by many French feminists as "feminine" or "women's" writing. Proponents of "writing the body" and "l'écriture feminine" posit a connection between writing and woman's body. Interestingly, Hélène Cixous argues that men, as well as women, are able to engage in such "bodily" writing, but only those men who are in touch with, and not afraid to acknowledge, their feminine selves. For a more detailed exploration of the notion of feminine and masculine selves, and for an in-depth explication of "writing the body" and "l'écriture feminine," see Cixous and Catherine Clément's _The Newly Born Woman_. See also Arleen Dallery's "The Politics of Writing (the) Body: Écriture Feminine," and Ann Rosalind Jones's "Writing the Body: toward an understanding of l'écriture feminine." For an informative study of Cixous and her writing, see Verena Andermatt Conley's _Hélène Cixous: Writing the Feminine_. "Mothertongue" is defined by several French feminist theorists as the way of speaking which originates in the mother's womb, in the state of semiotic union with the mother, and which is informed by the rhythms and fluids of the mother's body. It is the term used to describe the pre-verbal way of

speaking with the body before the acquisition of language. See "Decapitation: Secrecy and Silence" in chapter one, as well as chapter two, for an elaboration of the mothertongue and Potvin's return to such a pre-verbal state.

2. Luce Irigaray's "And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other," Cixous's "Coming to Writing" and Other Essays, Cixous and Clément's The Newly Born Woman, and Julia Kristeva's Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art are relevant to my discussion of the absent mother in White Lies.

3. Sandra Gilbert states that total sexual ecstasy is the most common connotation of jouissance,

> but in contemporary French philosophical, psychoanalytic, and political usage, it does not stop there, and to equate it with orgasm would be an over simplification. (Cixous and Clément 165)

She writes that it is "a word with *simultaneously* political, and economic overtones. Total access, total participation, as well as total ecstasy are implied" (Cixous and Clément 165).

4. On "breaking the silence," see also Elspeth Tulloch's Breaking the Silence: A Study of Sexual Assaults Against Children and Youths, and the Boston Women's Health Collective's Our Bodies Ourselves.

5. I delve further into the liberating effects of breaking the silence of incest in chapter two.

6. "And the wound I feel at your absence," Potvin writes to her mother, "is greater than any wound from him" (195). I discuss this further in chapter two.

7. For an interesting view of "thinking through the body," see also Marlene Kadar's article "Whose Life is it Anyway? Out of the Bathtub and into the Narrative," in which she discusses Socratic dialogues and cites Parmenides, who, not unlike Gallop, Cixous, and others, articulates the bodily nature of the mind. Parmenides proposes that "'thinking consists in composition of bodily parts. For it is an excess in the body that constitutes thought'" (157).

8. Feminist legal theorist Catherine Mackinnon, who also notes that it is a common survival strategy for the victim of sexual abuse to remove herself from the situation, to split away, to say this body that is being abused is not my body, calls the mind-body split "out-of-it-ness," and states that

> [m]any women who have been sexually abused . . . report having distanced and split themselves as a conscious strategy for coping with the abuse.
>
> . . . .
>
> Women often begin alienating themselves from

> their bodies self-preserving reactions under conditions under which they cannot stop the pain from being inflicted, . . . (147, 148)

I would like to draw attention to Mackinnon's use of the word "conscious" in the above quotation. I would argue that the act of splitting can be an unconscious, rather than a conscious, act. It is also important to note that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is prevalent among incest victims. In her informative report on incest, Heidi Vanderbilt explains that some incest victims have the same PTSD symptoms demonstrated by some Vietnam War veterans and most victims of torture. People who have PTSD may leave their bodies during abuse and may continue to dissociate for decades after the abuse ends (55). Judith Herman also discusses the affects of war and abuse on survivors in her Trauma and Recovery.

9. The term "crippled inner children" or "wounded inner children" is developed in contemporary psychology.
10. Even though Potvin refers to her inner selves as women (54), I would argue that they are her wounded inner child selves who hold experiences of abuse and who need to be nurtured and loved.
11. Although Cixous does not discuss the kind of psychological splitting incest survivors experience, the term "composite selves" can encompass all the

subject positions an individual works from and all the selves that make up an individual, including wounded inner children.

12. In my chapter on Potvin's absent mother, I take up the issue of mother-blaming and briefly interrogate some of Potvin's assumptions.

13. I would add "certain" women, for I am well aware that an undifferentiated category of women has problems and dangers. It is crucial to note that women work from numerous different cultural, economic, and racial positions, and that, therefore, not all woman have the same advantages or privileges as one another. Makeda Silvera, for instance, speaks with working class Caribbean women about their lives as domestic workers in Canada in Silenced.

14. In This Sex Which is Not One, Irigaray argues similarly to Cixous, for she asserts that "as soon as [woman] speaks (expresses herself, to herself), a woman is a man" (194). According to Irigaray, women are, socially, "'objects' for and among men and furthermore they cannot do anything but mimic a 'language' that they have not produced" (189). Speaking masculist language, however, means silence, for it means the repression of the female voice and of women's language. See also Ross Murfin's essay entitled "What is Feminist Criticism?", which clarifies somewhat Cixous's notion

of decapitation as a silencing mechanism. In a discussion of certain French feminists and their theories, Murfin writes:

> [L]anguage is associated with separation from the mother, is characterized by distinctions that represent the world from the male point of view, and is a system that seems to give women one of two choices. Either they can imagine and represent themselves as men imagine and represent them (in which case they may speak, but will speak as men) or they can remain a "gap" in the world that masculine logic would describe, in which case they choose silence, becoming in the process the "invisible and unheard sex." (174)

For an extensive discussion regarding separation from the mother and the acquisition of masculine language, as well as an elaboration of how decapitation allows Potvin to "speak" with only pre-verbal maternal language, see chapter two.

15. When she breaks her silence and tells her secrets, Potvin participates in her abusers' castration. For an explication of women's words as a form of castration, see chapter two.

16. Gilbert writes that

> [o]ne enters the Symbolic order when one is introduced to language, . . . The name (nom) and the prohibition (non) of the father are abstractions that will allow the child to take his or her place in the cultural system. There, learning to speak the language, he or she is limited and alienated, "spoken by it." (Cixous and Clément 168)

Several feminist theorists, such as Cixous, Irigaray, and Scott, are influenced by psychoanalysis and argue that when one enters the Symbolic, one enters a masculist order in which women are objectified and silenced. Terms such as "Name-of-the-Father" and "the world of the Father" refer to the male-defined Symbolic order.

17. This kind of psychoanalytic feminist theorizing originates in Lacan.

18. For the myth of Philomela and Tereus, see Edith Hamilton's Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes. Tereus, after raping Philomela, the sister of his wife,

> seized her and cut out her tongue. Then he left her in a strongly guarded place . . . Philomela's case looked hopeless. She was shut up; she could not speak; in those days

> there was no way of writing. . . . Philomela accordingly turned to her loom. With infinite pains and surpassing skill she produced a wondrous tapestry on which the whole account of her wrongs was unfolded. (Hamilton 270)

For an insightful essay on this myth and the texts of modern women writers, see Patricia Klindienst Joplin's "Epilogue: Philomela's Loom." See also chapter two and endnote 46, in which I make note of the recovery of Philomela and Potvin's voices.

19. The generalization Mackinnon makes is problematic and I would like to emphasize that not all women experience the kind of objectification and commodification she relates. (See also endnote 13.) However, a recent Statistics survey unfortunately discloses that

> [h]alf of all Canadian women have been physically or sexually assaulted by men at least once since the age of 16, . . . [The] study of male violence against women, . . . pegs the national average at 51 percent. (Arnold, "One in two women" A1)

20. See pages 29 and 30 for Scott's explanation of the two ways in which women speak.

21. It is interesting to note that Potvin is also an object of the pornographer's gaze. Her body is framed by and

inscribed with the gaze of her father and his male friends. Potvin is the object of the male gaze as her father and his friends undress and sexually abuse her. She is like the "I" in Irigaray's "And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other," who says "I, too, a captive when a man holds me in his gaze; I, too, am abducted from myself. Immobilized in the reflection he expects of me" (66).

22. Writers like Hyde, Driver, and Droisen, whose readings of sexual abuse are feminist, view sexual abuse as the logical extension in our patriarchal world of male power and misogyny. They argue that all women's lives are pervaded by misogyny and that, therefore, all women, solely because they are women, experience shame as a result of being ridiculed, hated, silenced, and made invisible.

23. It is important to note that being a woman is not synonymous with the kind of victimization experienced by survivors of sexual abuse.

24. Viewing her body as dirty and shameful, as the enemy, is yet another factor which contributes to the mind-body split Potvin performs.

25. As I discuss in chapter two, a dysfunctional family reading can be applied to the father-daughter incest that occurs between Potvin and her father.

26. By the use of the word "dark," I understand Cixous to mean "frightening" or "unknown." Women who have not explored their bodies and experimented with their sexuality are often frightened of such an exploration.

27. See also Bella Brodzki's article "Mothers, Displacement, and Language," in which Brodzki writes that "the daughter's text, . . . seeks to reject, reconstruct, and reclaim--to locate and recontextualize--the mother's message" (247).

28. See also Sidonie Smith's _A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation_, in which she points out that the _l'écriture feminine_ of Cixous, the _womanspeak_ of Irigaray, and the _jouissance_ of Kristeva find their voice in alliance with the mother and her milk, her body, and her rhythmic and nonsensical language (58).

29. Gilbert writes that in Lacanian theory, the mirror stage

> is a chronological development of the child, between six and eighteen months, in which the child emerges as an individual differentiated from the mother. The fragmented body images of early infancy begin to coalesce and produce an identity organized around what the infant sees of other identities, which, in turn, identify the infant. This first

> identification is the basis of all other identifications. (Cixous and Clément, The Newly Born Woman 166)

Hazel Rowley and Elizabeth Grosz also discuss Lacanian theory in their article "Psychoanalysis and Feminism." And Irigaray and Gallop respond to Lacan in This Sex Which is Not One and The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis respectively.

30. Perhaps it is also important to read this refusal to breast-feed in a historical context, for at the time of Potvin's birth, women were actively discouraged from breast-feeding.

31. Vanderbilt also argues that in order to recover, victims of sexual abuse

> must place responsibility 100 percent on the offender. If they fail to lay the blame there, they will remain forever in emotional paralysis, wracked by guilt and pain and unable to grow. (74)

Consequently, Williamson writes that

> [m]y sense is that many women survivors experience their rage at the non-perpetrating mother as contradiction. On the one hand, the child-self blames the mother for abandoning [her] (even if the mother had no knowledge of the abuse). On the other hand,

> the adult-woman evaluates the mother's behaviour within a personal, social and cultural environment which makes her implosive behaviour more understandable. (Personal correspondence)

32. It is important to ask the question: "How do we frame critiques of the mother within a mother-blaming culture?" Some of the problem is the formulation of the mother=pre-oedipal=semiotic=babble, a space which does not allow the mother to talk back with much coherence. In The Subject of Semiotics, Kaja Silverman critiques the positioning of the mother in this way and argues that the acquisition of language is often dependent upon the mother. For an effective study centred around the mother-blaming question, see also Janis Tyler Johnson's ground-breaking text Mothers of Incest Survivors: Another Side of the Story.

33. Johnson also writes that "if a mother is overwhelmed with stress or suffering from depression," which appears to be the case with Potvin's mother, "she may not have the capacity to see and know about everything that is going on in the family" (107).

34. Johnson argues that

> we need to examine further the husband-wife power relationships in incest-families before we can have confidence in a simple powerless

> mother or patriarchal family incest hypothesis. (114)

Butler, on the other hand, argues that husbands rob their wives of power, and that

> [i]f women are so robbed of power and strength that a mother feels she is unable to prevent her husband's assault on her daughter, then we need to look at women's oppression as a direct cause of incestuous assault. (330)

35. The son of Minos, ruler of Crete, was killed in Athens; to avenge the death of his son, Minos

> invaded the country, captured Athens and declared that he would raze it to the ground unless every nine years the people sent him a tribute of seven maidens and seven youths. (Hamilton 151)

When these youths reached Crete, they were taken to Minos's labyrinth, from which there was no escape and in which a Minotaur would devour them. Theseus was one of a tribute of youths; however, Minos's daughter, Ariadne, fell in love with him and vowed to bring about his escape if he promised to marry her. She informed him that he was to fasten a ball of thread

> at one end to the inside of the door and unwind as he went on. This he did and,

> certain that he could retrace his steps whenever he chose, he walked boldly into the maze looking for the Minotaur. He came upon him asleep and fell upon him, pinning him to the ground; and with fists . . . he battered the monster to death. . . . When Theseus lifted himself up from the terrific struggle, the ball of thread lay where he had dropped it. With it in his hands, the way out was clear. (Hamilton 152)

36. In a discussion of Chodorow's feminist psychoanalysis, Hirsch relates how the basis of female identity lies in the pre-oedipal period, where the mother-daughter bonding and connection characterize female identity (Mother/Daughter Plot 132). And Susan Suleiman, like Hunter, asserts in her article "Writing and Motherhood" that the mother is "the mirror in whom the child searches for [her] own reflection" (357).

37. The factors which most likely motivate the coldness and indifference of Potvin's mother are her own experiences of abuse and pain, and her own fragmented sense of self. Johnson writes that the mothers of incest victims she interviewed

> really did not want to think or talk about the ways their daughters might have been damaged physically or psychologically by the

> incest. They . . . expressed how painful it was to think about the incest itself. It was almost as if the pain numbed them and served as a blanket to protect them from knowing any further details. (101)

This appears to be the case with Potvin's mother. Her behaviour and her history of nervous breakdowns--part of a possible history of sexual abuse--suggest that she is emotionally and physically unable to even think about, let alone deal with, the abuse her daughter endures.

38. In The Snow Queen, the faces of those who looked into the troll's mirror "were so distorted they were quite unrecognizable" (Andersen 2).

39. Like Nice, Butler writes, in a discussion of the dysfunctional family model, that mothers are viewed as promoting incest by "'frustrating their husbands sexually or symbolically deserting them and encouraging their daughters to assume mothering functions'" (329). Butler also points out that theorists of dysfunctional families ignore the fact that the father does not assume the wife's maternal role when she withdraws or is incapacitated. She writes: "'[T]he man feels his first right is to receive the services which his wife formerly provided, sometimes including sexual services'" (329).

40. Butler also argues that dysfunctional family interpretations of father-daughter incest are "grounded in the premise that mothers are responsible for maintaining the family unit in a state of balance and equilibrium" (329). This logic suggests, she elaborates, that if mothers withdraw from their roles, then all that happens within the family unit is her fault (329).

41. See also Williamson's interview with Brossard, "'Before I became a feminist, I suppose I was an angel, a poet, a revolutionary . . . ,'" in which Brossard talks about the line "'I have murdered the womb and am writing it'" in her L'Amèr (61).

42. Irigaray argues that "'a woman, if she cannot in one way or another, recuperate her first object [her mother], . . . is exiled from herself'" (Brodzki 246).

43. In her article "Mothers and Daughters," Hirsch discusses Kristeva, who claims that the semiotic is opposed to the Symbolic, that it is

> pre-oedipal, chronologically anterior to syntax, a cry, the gesture of a child. In adult discourse . . . It is a break in the paternal order and woman . . . has special access to it. (210)

And in her text Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art, Kristeva argues that

> [e]very cry is, psychologically and projectively, . . . a cry of distress, up to and including the first vocalizations which seem to constitute distress calls, . . . (282)

44. Scarry also writes that "under the pressure of the desire to eliminate pain," however, "a fragmentary means of verbalization is available" (Scarry 13). And it is interesting to note her assertion that the "poems and narratives of individual artists . . . record the passage of pain into speech" (9). Potvin's narrative, the page, is a safe place in which Potvin's movement from the Symbolic to the pre-verbal states of language, and then to a state of language not authorized by her abusers, is recorded.
45. See Smith's A Poetics of Women's Autobiography, in which she writes that "[r]ejecting the old 'tongue' of the father and all patriarchs who have sentenced her to death, [a woman] may, . . . remember and then reinvest with her own meaning a maternal language" (57-8).
46. In White Woman Speaks With Forked Tongue: Criticism as Autobiography, Nicole Ward Jouve relates an interesting story about a seventeenth-century girl with smallpox whose tongue withered and dropped out. But because the girl, Marie Grelard, had such a passionate desire to communicate, "with the stump of her tongue she managed

first to make articulate sounds, stammer, then gradually recovered the power of speech" (76). Like Grelard and like Philomela, Potvin, whose tongue has been cut out and who must give voice to her story in order to heal, also finds a way to recover the power of her speech. Philomela "'weaves a telltale account of her violation into a tapestry'" (Joplin 254), and Potvin writes White Lies. Both these texts are "born of necessity, of closeted wrongs" (Joplin 258). With strength and courage, Grelard, Philomela, and Potvin find ways to overcome their silence. As voice is given to their experiences, the act of telling becomes an act of self-love and self-nurturance for Philomela and Potvin.

47. Danica effectively communicates the inadequacy of male discourse:

> [W]hen I tried to write in what I thought were appropriate ways--how I'd been *taught* language--the writing was *awful*, . . . The language we are obliged to use works to obliterate or minimalize our pain. In patriarchal language we're not supposed to tell the truth about our lives and our pain. . . . If words are not gender-neutral but gender-male, how can that language be used to tell *our* stories? (Williamson, "'an enormous

risk, but it's got to be done'" 84)

48. In her Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts, Miller discusses the ways in which the politics of identity and location influence academic work. Jouve discusses criticism as autobiography in White Woman Speaks With Forked Tongue. And for an insightful collection of essays on academia and personal testimony, see Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn's Changing Subjects: The Making of Feminist Literary Criticism. Jerry Aline Flieger's "Growing Up Theoretical: Across the Divide" in Changing Subjects, for example, discusses "divides"--one of them being middle age--in Flieger's personal intellectual history, as well as the divide between feminist theory and practice.

49. In her text "'I Peel Myself Out of My Own Skin': Reading Don't: A Woman's Word," Williamson deals with the notion of "inappropriate"/personal responses to survivor discourse.

50. Among other texts, Bass and Davis's The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse, and Toni Ann Laidlaw and Cheryl Malmo's Healing Voices: Feminist Approaches to Therapy With Women were particularly helpful.

51. For an interesting discussion of privilege, see Peggy McIntosh's "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A

Personal Account of Coming to see Correspondence Through Work in Women's Studies." She writes:

> [T]he word 'privilege' now seems to me misleading. Its connotations are too positive to fit the conditions and behaviors which 'privilege systems' produce. We usually think of privilege as being a favored state, whether earned, or conferred by birth or luck. . . . The word 'privilege' carries the connotation of being something everyone must want. Yet some conditions . . . work to systematically overempower certain groups. (77)

52. My grampa Babie passed away on 15 November 1992.
53. In the Ukrainian tradition, if you eat a small amount of wheat with Christmas dinner, you will not go hungry in the new year.
54. My grandfather Uniacke passed away on 23 May 1987.

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